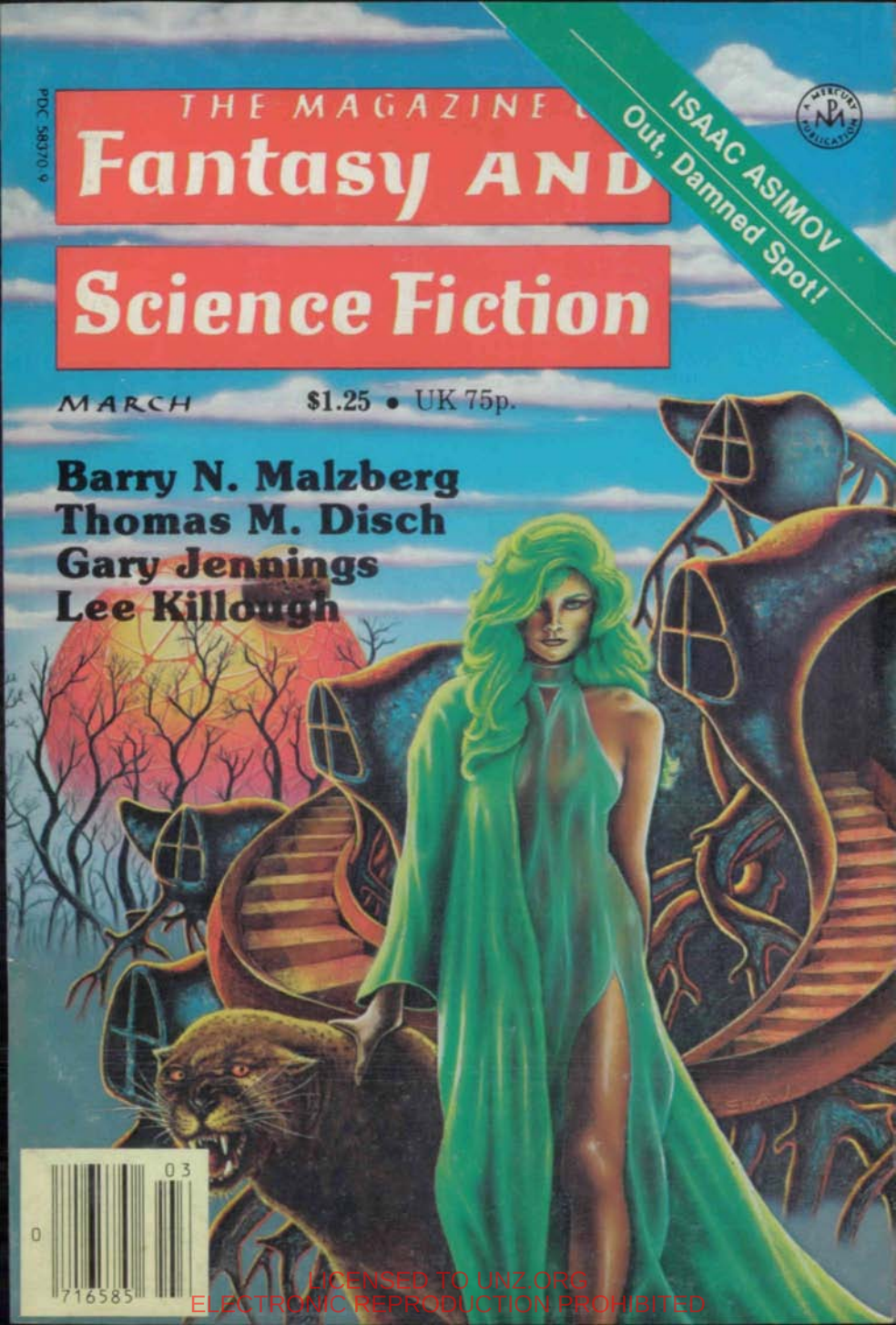

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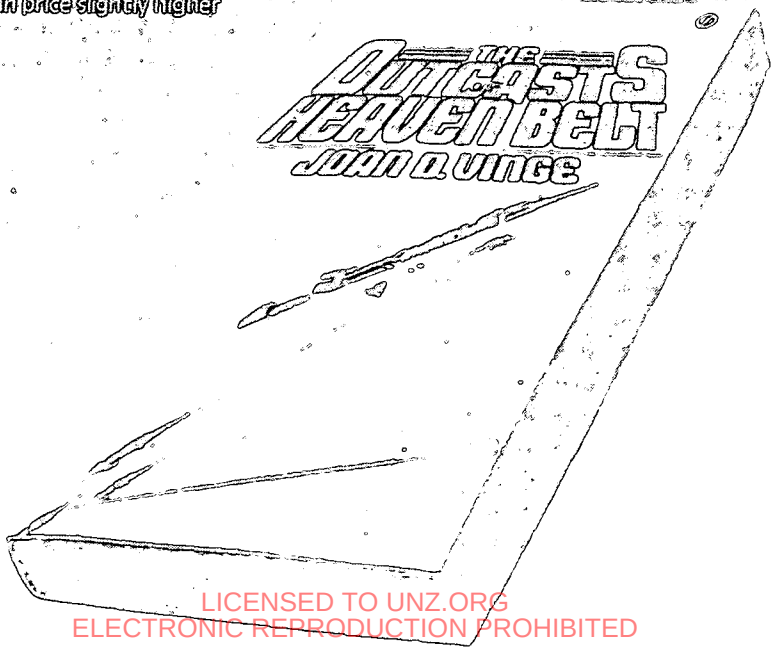

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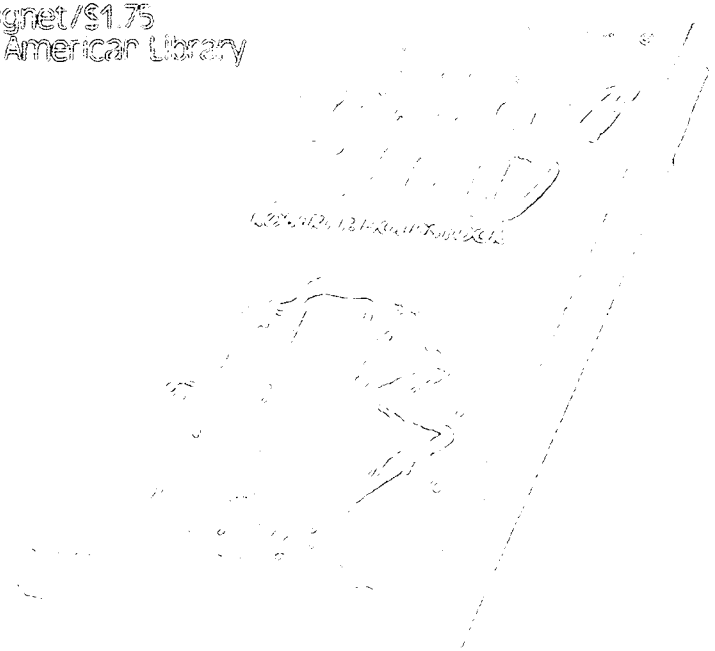

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ON WINGS OF SONG *(2nd of 3 parts)*	**THOMAS M. DISCH**	**101**

NOVELET

HOMO SAP	**GARY JENNINGS**	**52**

SHORT STORIES

BROKEN STAIRWAYS, WALLS OF TIME	**LEE KILLOUGH**	**8**
THE ATTENUATED MAN	**JOE PATROUCH**	**32**
THE INCREDIBLY THICK WORLD	**THOMAS WYLDE**	**41**
THE PROXY	**RAMSEY CAMPBELL**	**73**
THE ANNUAL BASH AND CIRCUMSTANCE PARTY	**BARRY N. MALZBERG**	**94**

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS	**ALGIS BUDRYS**	**22**
CARTOON	**GAHAN WILSON**	**31**
FILMS: *Rattletrap Galactica*	**BAIRD SEARLES**	**70**
WINSLOW CARTER *(Verse)*	**EDWARD BRYANT**	**82**
SCIENCE: *Out, Damned Spot!*	**ISAAC ASIMOV**	**83**
LETTERS		**158**

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 56, No. 3, Whole No. 334; Mar. 1979. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.25 per copy. Annual subscription $12.50; $14.50 outside of the U.S. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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Broken Stairways, Walls of Time

by LEE KILLOUGH

I never think of Aventine without remembering Cybele Bournais. Once, years ago, we were lovers there. We lived together for ten unforgettable months, over a spring and a summer into winter, until my holosymphony "Summer and Cybele" took us our separate ways to fame. She lingers in my memory more clearly than in any holo album. I see her on the broken stairways of her Treehouse, beyond the walls of time grown up between us, forever young, forever golden-voiced. I choose not to remember how our last meeting ended, except to wonder from time to time what malicious caprice of fate could have wanted to bring us together again, then asked such a price for the meeting.

I was not thinking of Cybele when I came back to Aventine. I was looking at architecture. My new holosymphony was to be about the personalities of houses, and Aventine was full of homes with character. Even twenty-five years ago, when the stargate had just been built above Gateside on Diana Mountain and Aventine was an artists' colony, not the retreat of the rich and famous it is now, there had been eccentrics living there. They built highly individual, often bizarre houses. Days when the feverish pitch of our creativity faltered and no one felt like hanging around Xhosar Kain's studio or walking down to Jessica Vanier's cabin on Birch Cove, we would go house-watching. We could kill an afternoon staring at Taj Mahals and Norman castles, pseudo-Frank Lloyd Wrights and other constructions that defied ready classification. Now I understood from Margo Chen, my agent in Gateside, there were more and even stranger houses.

I had the chance to discover first-hand how right she was. Be-

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cause I was not sure what I would find, I would not let Margo hire anyone to approach the owners. Using a hired car, I drove around Aventine looking at the houses myself and personally asking permission to tape them. Some owners refused but most offered complete cooperation. They were flattered to have their houses included in a holosymphony by the famous Simon Doyle.

And so it was that early one afternoon I drove the car up the pine-lined drive of the house that twenty-five years ago we had named the Treehouse. It was not in a tree but tree-shaped. From a ground-level reception hall, half a dozen stairways swept upward like great branches through clear plastic tubes. Along the graceful arabesques, rooms blossomed like flowers.

I stopped the car. As it sank to the ground in a dying whine of fans, I could see the house was aging. The plastic of the stair tubes had yellowed. On several of the higher flights, the carpeting was threadbare. There were even gaping holes left where treads and risers had torn loose. The lawns were tangled and overgrown. I got out of the car wondering how the owners of the neighboring estates tolerated this derelict in their midst. No other house in Aventine was in such a state of disrepair. Perhaps it survived because it could not be seen from the road.

I walked under the stairways and around the house, staring up at the room platforms. The drapes inside the transparent walls were closed, but the sag of several in upper rooms suggested more neglect. I pictured the furniture thick with dust. Was the house abandoned? If so, how could I contact the owner? I certainly wanted to use it in my holosymphony. If anything, its seedy appearance only strengthened its character.

"Excuse me," a voice said behind me, "but this is private property. Unless you have business, I must ask you to leave."

For a moment I was frozen. There was only one voice in the world that could sound so polite, so warm with life and laughter, and still carry a threatening edge of steel. I turned and looked down into fondly remembered jade eyes.

Cybele Bournais was still the thin, heart-high girl I had known twenty-five years before. Her jade-green hair still hung loose about her, a silky cape long enough to sit on. And she still appeared to like those high-necked body suits that fit like a coat of paint. This one was black.

"Cybele, this is a wonderful surprise," I said.

The jade eyes regarded me without recognition.

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I frowned. "Surely I haven't changed that much. I'm Simon Doyle."

She looked thoughtful. "Just a moment." She disappeared.

I stared at the spot where she had vanished. I wondered again, as I sometimes had before, if she were entirely human. She had appeared suddenly one winter, a no one from nowhere, just a diminutive girl with a starvation appetite and a magic voice. Lord, that voice! It was all she needed. It was a fine musical instrument she played with consummate skill. She built visions for us, made flowers in the snow and comets at noon...moved us to any emotion she desired. In the beginning, she sang in bars in Gateside, and when she could not find work, she lived with one or another of us. There was always someone willing to give her a bed.

Cybele reappeared. This time she wore a metallic red bodysuit and her hair was pulled back in a long horsetail. "Simon, of course I recognize you." Her voice was mellow gold as a spring dawn. "I never expected to see you here."

I realized then what was happening. This was not actually Cybele but a holographic image. The first one had been a recording, triggered by my presence, to warn me away. My response was outside its program, and so it had been replaced by a holo which could deal with me. But why the second holo, I wondered.

"Cybele, are you back behind your watchdog somewhere?"

The holo regarded me a moment, then smiled. "Yes, I am."

"Why the puppet show? Come down and see me yourself."

I peered up at the house, trying to find the room she might be in.

"You must allow me my fun, Simon." Her voice tickled like a lash with a feather tied to the end. "You instigated my fascination with holography, you know. I think it was why I married Eldon."

I remembered learning she had married Eldon Kleist, the computer king, when I read about his death in a hovercraft accident. That had been — I thought back — nearly six years ago.

"What brings you to the Treehouse?" Cybele asked through the holo.

"A new composition. How long have you lived here?"

"Since my husband died." She lifted a brow. "I know the rest of you laughed at it, but I've always loved this house. Women look so graceful on stairways." The holo moved toward the front door. "Come on up."

With a click, the door swung open. "Go in," the holo said and disappeared.

Inside, the reception hall did not repeat the derelict look of the

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outside. The black-and-white tile had a mirror polish, reflecting bright tapestries and paintings hung between the stairways. The door closed behind me. As it shut, another holo appeared in one of the stairway entrances. This one was of Cybele, too, but her hair was black and cut chin length. She wore a linen dress and an elaborate Egyptian headdress.

"This way," she said.

I followed her up the stairs.

"How do you like my costume?"

"It's from 'Cleopatra,' isn't it?"

"You recognize it." Cybele sounded pleased. "Did you ever see—" She blinked out of existence as we turned a bend in the stairs but reappeared a moment later and continued talking as if there had been no interruption. "—the show? I sang in it for almost five years." She began one of its songs that she had helped make popular. Her voice was as magical as ever. She broke off as we reached a door a dizzying distance above the ground. "Go on in."

I pushed open the door and went in.

"Hello, Simon."

Cybele sat curled in a huge basket chair at the far end of the sitting room. I started toward her, but stopped short as I saw the two black leopards lounging around the bottom of the chair. One of them lifted its head and snarled.

"They won't hurt you, Simon. Sit down anywhere."

I eyed the leopards and found a leather chair at what I hoped was a prudent distance away.

Cybele arched a brow, then shrugged. "Tell me everything that's happened to you since we saw each other last."

"You tell me about you," I replied.

"Your work is so much more fascinating. I've been one of your most faithful collectors, did you know that? I have everything you've ever done. This is my favorite, of course."

I did not see her do anything, but suddenly the sitting room was a summer mountain meadow. Flowers grew at my feet. They looked real enough to pick, and though I could not smell them, I found myself imagining the scent. Music swelled into the opening theme from "Summer and Cybele."

I listened critically. It could have been better. I wished I had had the ability of today's computers when I was synthesizing the sound for the holosymphony.

A small figure in white was running up the meadow toward me. In moments Cybele dropped, laughing, into the flowers at my feet. The soundtrack began the

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first strains of the theme Paul McCartney later set to words for her as "I am Summer."

The meadow returned to being a sitting room. Cybele smiled at me. "Where are you staying?"

"I have a hotel room in Gateside."

She frowned. "Gateside? But that means an hour's ride over on the cabletrain every morning and an hour back at night."

I shrugged. "There are no hotels in Aventine."

She looked at me. "I have fourteen bedrooms I don't use."

"Above the broken stairs?"

"Mostly below. My rooms are above."

I frowned. "Your rooms? Cybele, those stairs are dangerous."

Her expression remained placid but a smile flickered in her voice. "It does insure privacy."

My brows went up. Since when had Cybele Bournais, keep-me-in-the-center Cybele, wanted privacy? Or gone to such measures to guard it?

But after that my protests were only token. This was an ideal base for taping. I could reach any house I wanted in a matter of minutes. I could even walk in some instances. And in the evening, there would be the company of this fascinating woman I had once passionately desired and almost loved. I wanted very much to learn how much she had changed, too, and why. I gave in to her.

She nodded as though she had expected nothing else. Standing, she started for the door. "We'll tour the house and you can pick the room you like best."

With yawns and stretches, the panthers rose to follow her.

I bit my lip. "Are they coming, too?"

She laughed back over her shoulder. "I told you, they won't hurt you."

One of the panthers passed by me so close its tail touched my leg. I could not feel it, though. Nor could I smell the animal, I realized.

"They're holos, aren't they?"

Cybele nodded. A panther rubbed against her leg. She stroked the huge black head.

I frowned. The big cats might be very realistic, but holos could not be touched.

"This way, Simon."

As she passed through the door, she disappeared momentarily. I was not surprised.

"And you're another." Only holos could touch other holos.

She turned around. Her voice flung that feather-tipped lash at me again. "It took you long enough to realize it. This one is very good, don't you think?"

I sighed. "What kind of game are you playing?"

She smiled. "Showing an old

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lover he isn't the only one who can play with holos."

"When do I see the real you?"

"Soon enough. Indulge me awhile longer. Now come see my Treehouse."

The holo showed me through the house. We climbed the sweeping arabesques of its stair branches, looked into the fourteen vacant bedrooms, saw sitting rooms and game rooms, checked the dining room. The holo, whom I privately dubbed the panther lady, moved with such naturalness and reacted so appropriately to me and the house, even making subtle changes in facial expression, that it was hard to remember this was just an image, not a living woman. But around our feet were the panthers, which occasionally walked through my legs, and the panther lady did disappear momentarily at points along the stairs and as we went through doorways. There was that to remind me she was not real.

In one room we tripped an automatic holo. She appeared before the fireplace in a gold bodysuit, her hair striped orange and red. "Welcome," she said. "This game room is appointed with—" She broke off. When she resumed a moment later, her voice was casual instead of hostess-polite. "This is Lady Sunshine, from 'Suddenly Spring.' Pardon me for not shutting her down before you arrived. When you wander around on your own, you'll find others like her. They're there to explain the facilities of each room."

Lady Sunshine smiled, curtsied, and was turned off.

We did see a few other holos. Once we met Cleopatra again and, for a few moments before Cybele turned her off, a woman on the stairs in Tudor dress. I recognized Anne Boleyn as Cybele had played her in Kyle Rogers' operetta "Anne."

I finally chose a bedroom low on a solid flight of stairs and drove down to the town square to catch the late afternoon cabletrain back to Gateside for my equipment. By midnight I was back and installed in the Treehouse. Cleopatra was in the reception hall, but she gave only programmed responses to questions I asked. The rest of the house was dark and silent.

I woke in the morning to find a short-haired Cybele in a green jerkin and hose sitting curled on the foot of my bed. A fairy fluttered over her head. I slid a foot toward her. It passed under her without obstruction.

"Good morning, Peter Pan," I said.

The holo laughed. "You're really very clever, Simon. When you're up, come over to the dining room for breakfast."

"Are you going to be there?"

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She regarded me silently for a moment, then said with amusement, "Yes. Don't be too long or everything will be cold."

Peter and Tinkerbell winked out.

Cybele was indeed in the dining room. Dozens of her were, every holo manifestation of her in her computer: Cleopatra, Anne Boleyn, Lady Sunshine, the panther lady, and many Cybeles in costumes I could not identify. The panthers were there, too, and a pair of magnificent leopards, prowling majestically among the Cybeles. All the holos were talking to each other.

I was awed by the thought of the program necessary to handle this many conversations...until I listened more closely. Except for an occasional punch line of a joke or anecdote, the "conversations" were simply continuous repetitions of, "Mumble, murmur, chatter, mumble."

I was standing there wondering how to find breakfast in this mob when Cybele's voice called above the noise of her Doppelgangers. "I'm here, Simon."

The question was, where, but I had no desire to chase her through a crowd of phantoms. "I don't have time for games; I'm sorry. I have to work today. I hope I can see you this evening."

I turned and started to leave.

The noise stopped with a suddenness that left a vacuum. I looked back. All the holos were gone. I was alone with the long table and a woman at the far end, jade-haired in a jade-green bodysuit and wide belt of knotted gold cords.

She arched her brows and slid her fingers over the knots of her belt. "How serious you've become." Her voice carried a light sting.

Cybele, if it were really she this time, looked less hungry than the girl I had lived with, but otherwise little changed by the years. I started toward her to take a closer look.

"Sit down and eat your breakfast," she said.

I eyed her. "Are you real?"

For answer, she picked an orange from a bowl in front of her and tossed it at me. I fully expected my fingers to close through it, but when I caught the fruit, it was solid and real.

Cybele's fingers touched the belt at her waist. "I have to work today, too."

"Cybele—" I began.

But she rose and swept past me out of the room.

I wished I could tape here today, so I could track her through the house and talk to her, but I had another house already scheduled. I ate, collected my cameras, and left the Treehouse.

The house I had scheduled took

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all day. Cut into the cliffs above the long winding length of the Lunamere, the house made exterior shots difficult. I had to do them with a telephoto lens from points to each side along the cliffs and from a boat below. It was late afternoon before exterior and interior taping was finished.

I came back to the Treehouse in the early evening to find it ablaze with light and music and alive with holos moving up and down the stairs. Cloepatra attended the reception hall. When I asked for Cybele, she led me up to a sitting room.

Cybele sat in a large easy chair before a lighted fireplace at the far end, leopards lounging at her feet. Her eyes were fixed on a holo of herself seated on a tall stool in the middle of the room, singing. I recognized both the song and holo as being from an album she made not long after leaving Aventine.

I coughed. Cybele's eyes switched from the holo to me. The girl on the stool went out.

"Ah, Simon, you're back." Her voice had a delight that sent an old warmth up my back.

I started for her chair, intending to kiss her. Cybele frowned. The leopards lifted their heads and snarled. I knew they were only holos but I stopped. Cybele's message was clear. It puzzled and disturbed me, though. Cybele used to like being touched and shown affection.

As though she sensed the questions in me, Cybele drew farther back into her chair. She toyed with the knots of her belt. "I hope you had a good day."

I considered asking her outright what was wrong. The Cybele of old had been adamant in refusing to talk about things she had not volunteered, however, and I did not think that that had changed. I let the questions run around unasked inside me. "I'll know how good when I replay the tapes. Would you like to see them?"

Her face lighted. "I would. Thank you."

The fire went out. The leopards followed us down and across to my room, though, and stretched out at her feet again when she sat down in a chair near the door.

"Why don't you stand over here near me?" I asked.

She smiled. "I'm sure I'll be able to see just as well from here."

If she had not remained undisturbed by passing through doors and I had not felt her solidarity as I brushed her during the walk I might have wondered if she were Cybele after all or only another of Cybele's holos. I toyed with the thought, then pushed it aside as I fed the tapes into my computer.

"There's no sound right now, of course. I won't synthesize that

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until I have my visual sequences the way I want them."

"I remember."

The bedroom became part of the Grotto, with lamps and planters attached to stalactites and stalagmites rising from the floor to support tables and couches. A wall entirely of glass looked out over the cobalt waters of the Lunamere.

"So that's what it looks like inside," Cybele's voice said. "Remember how much time we spent wondering? What fun you must be having finding out if our guesses were right or not."

I had to admit I enjoyed the taping. "Tomorrow should be even better. I'm doing the pink Sugar Plum Castle on Star Circle. Why don't you come with me?"

"Thank you, but I almost never go out."

I shut off the tape with a stab of my finger. Cybele sat with her chin bowed, her jade hair obscuring her face.

"You make personal appearances, don't you?"

She shook her head. "I even tape my albums here. I have a studio set up." She gestured vaguely upward.

I could not believe this. Cybele Bournais...a *reculse?* "But you've always loved crowds and traveling."

She shrugged. "People change. I'm afraid I'm keeping you from your work. I'll see you later."

She left, trailed by the holo leopards.

But in fact she hardly saw me later. We had dinner seated at opposite ends of the long table with holo Cybeles lining both sides between us. After dinner we climbed to the sitting room with the fireplace. Cleopatra and Peter Pan went with us, chattering in simultaneous but unrelated conversations about Mark Antony and Never-Never Land. In the sitting room Cybele touched the keys embedded in the arm of the big chair by the fireplace and filled the room with "Summer and Cybele."

She made it impossible to get anywhere near her that night. In the morning, I had to share breakfast with the leopards and panthers as well as Cybele. I had spent the night thinking, however, and I had a carrot I hoped would tempt her closer.

"I've put off the Sugar Plum Castle until another day and I'm taping the Treehouse today."

She straightened in her chair. "May I watch?"

"Of course." I had been hoping she would ask.

And in fact it did bring her out. She still kept a distance between us, but less than the night before, as she followed me everywhere. She watched with fascination as I taped from every possible angle in

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every room and stairway. When I caught her in the frame, she did not mind at all.

I dangled another carrot. "How would you like to be the subject of another holosymphony? We could call it 'Encore: Cybele.'"

She bit her lip and looked down. "It wouldn't be the same, Simon. Repeats never are. That's why I never renew a relationship with a man once it's over." She looked at me through her hair. "You were hoping to take up where we left off, weren't you?"

Not really, though the idea had occurred to me.

"It's out of the question." She played her voice, making it curl around me and sting like a lash. "I wouldn't want to spoil my memories of our time together before."

"There's more to it than that." I was, strangely, angry as well as concerned. She was half-lying, evading, throwing phantoms up between us. I put down my camera and started up the staircase to where she stood slightly above me. "You won't even shake hands. What is it? Why are you afraid to be touched? Are you real, or just another holo after all?"

She fled away from me, up one flight after another, up the broken stairways. I tried to follow but the gaping hole made by missing treads stopped me. I could not imagine how Cybele had climbed this way. She must have, though: I saw her above me, in one last glimpse of jade hair and green bodysuit, before the door of her room slammed between us.

I stood for some time watching the door of her room high above me. It remained closed. After a while I went down to a sitting room and called Margo in Gateside.

"Tell me about Cybele Bournais."

Margo's voice came back dryly over the wire. "My dear Simon, what can I possibly tell you about her you haven't already learned for yourself long ago?"

"When did she become a hermit?"

"Oh...that. She was in that hovercraft accident with her husband. Afterwards she was gone for nearly a year. Rumor said she was in Switzerland, having her face rebuilt. When she came back, she bought the Treehouse and, except for her albums and a few media appearances, has virtually dropped from sight. She's never turned away visitors. She's even thrown large parties up there, but her agent tells me she refuses personal appearance offers every week. If you find out anything, do let me know."

I was setting down the phone receiver when she added, "Stay

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out of high rooms today. There's a thunderstorm here that's a good preview of apocalypse and it's headed your way."

I glanced out the window. Purple-grey clouds were boiling across the sky, burying the blue.

I hung up and hurried back to my camera. I did not want to miss the chance to tape the house in changing weather. Not until several minutes later did it register that as I was laying down the receiver, there had been not one click of disconnection on the other end but two. Cybele must have been listening in on my conversation with Margo.

The wind was rising. I could feel it pushing at the stairways. The sky became a dark tent, sagging in water-logged bulges overhead. Soon, flickers of lightning were chasing across the bulges.

I forgot the Treehouse and pointed my camera at the sky. Somewhere, sometime, I might need some footage of a storm, and this one promised to be very dramatic.

The first thunder reached me. It shivered the tubes of the stairways.

"Simon."

I looked up to see Cybele coming down the stairs above me. For a moment I imagined I could see her hair streaming in the wind, but it was only rippling caused by the motion of her descent. She stopped seven or eight steps from me.

"Don't pry into my life." Her voice cracked like a bolt of lightning, echoing the flashes overhead.

"I'm not trying to pry, but I'm concerned about you."

Her hands were at her belt, tracing the knotted cords. "You're curious. There's a difference. I invited you to stay because I was once happy living with you and wanted to see you again, but if you meddle in matters that don't concern you, I'll have to ask you to leave." Lightning glared on her face, striking sparks in her jade eyes.

I sighed. "All right. I leave you to live your life as you wish, but I wish—"

I never had a chance to tell her I wished she would tell me what had made her change. From the corner of my eye, I saw lightning arc from clouds down to the mountain below us. The lights along the stairs went out.

I whistled. "That one hit a power line. Do you have candles? We'd better light some."

By flashes of lightning I saw Cybele staring at me in horror. She clutched at her belt.

"Candles?" I repeated.

For the second time that day she fled away from me up the broken stairways to her room. And

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again I followed, trying to remember exactly where the breaks were so I would not fall in. I could see enough by the frequent lightning to find my way after her. Strangely, I found no breaks. I found myself just a few steps below her door without having seen any of the holes in the stairs.

I looked back behind me. By the lightning, I saw the stairs dropping away, whole and sound. Suddenly I understood. The broken sections were holographic illusions. When the electricity in the house went off, so had the holos. I whirled to stare up at Cybele's door. More holos. What was real and how much holo in this house? And why?

I made the last few steps in two bounds and knocked on her door. "Cybele, open the door."

There was no response from inside.

I knocked again. "Cybele, answer me."

I heard something inside, but not a voice. It sounded like metal scraping over metal.

I pounded. "Are you all right, Cybele?"

There was only that scraping sound. Then I heard her panting. I tried the door. Not surprisingly, it was locked. I peered at the lock. It looked intended to be more of a reminder than a deterrent. I raised a foot and gave it a hard kick.

The door opened in a crash of splintering wood and screech of metal. Inside, by the light of an oil lamp, I saw Cybele whirl from a piece of equipment.

I looked around the room. It must be the studio she mentioned. It was packed with recording equipment and computer elements. It was capable of running all the holos in the house and then some. And the piece before Cybele was a battery-powered generator. The oil lamp was sitting on top of it, lighting her work.

"Your auxilary power is out, too? May I help you there?" I asked.

She pointed the screwdriver she held toward the door. "Get out."

She was obviously speaking. Her lips were moving and the sound came from her direction, but the voice was not Cybele's. Not even in moments of greatest stress had Cybele ever used a high-pitched rasp like that.

I stared at her in disbelief. "Cybele?"

Over our heads, rain rattled on the roof. Thunder boomed.

Cybele glared at me with the eyes of a trapped animal. "Yes, I'm Cybele. Now get out of my house."

The words were rough, the syllables broken, without any of the rich beauty and control Cybele was famous for, but they were filled

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with more hate than I had ever heard in a human voice before. The hand not holding the screwdriver fumbled for her belt, stopped, and went to her throat.

Then I understood. This was Cybele's real voice. The one I had been hearing these past days came from the computer. The controls were in the knotted gold belt she was always touching.

"What happened?" I asked.

She looked down so her long jade hair fell forward over her face. Thunder made her voice almost inaudible. "...crushed my throat in the hovercraft accident."

Surgeons and cosmetisculpturing could rebuild a face but not restore something as delicate as a voice. I fought down a wave of pity. I did not want to pity her. Actually, what she had now was not a bad voice. Its hoarseness might even have been attractive in another woman, but Cybele had had something so remarkable, so beautiful, that anything less was grotesquely ugly. I searched for something to say that would not sound pitying.

"So you've been synthesizing your voice for speaking and your albums the past five years. You've done a spectacular job."

It certainly explained many things about her behavior. She had to stay near a computer in order to talk.

Cybele tossed her hair back. Her eyes were those of a tigress. She came at me with the screwdriver in both hands, like a dagger.

It was so sudden she almost drove the blade into my neck before I realized what she was doing. I grabbed for her arms. The blade scraped my forearm.

"Cybele, stop that!"

I had hold of her wrists, but I could not twist the screwdriver out of her grip. Anger made her incredibly strong. The blade dug into my other forearm as she struggled to pull free. I used all my strength to lift her off her feet and throw her backward, away from me.

She hit the front of the auxilary generator. The oil lamp on top rocked once and fell forward. It shattered as it hit the floor.

I yelled a warning and leaped to pull Cybele aside, but the sheet of flame went up between us. In seconds the oil and fire were everywhere. I searched frantically for a way through to her.

"I can't get to you," I called. "Come through this way. I'll put out any fire on you."

Cybele only spat at me. She spun, heading for a balcony. In doing so, though, the end of her long hair brushed the flames. The entire shining jade mass of her hair exploded into deadly, writhing orange.

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"Cybele." I fought to reach her but the flame seared my throat. driving me back. "CYBELE!"

She screamed only once and that, I swear, not in pain or fear. She screamed in hate. *"Meddling bastard."*

Then I was choking on heat and flame and smoke. I stumbled backward out the door and down the steps. Flame raced down the stair carpeting after me. I did not try to save the tapes or computer in my room. I fled straight for the reception hall and out through the front door into the pelting rain. At the first of the pines lining the driveway I stopped to cough the smoke out of my lungs, I looked back.

The fire was spreading rapidly. In the seconds I watched, flame skipped along the stairways and blossomed into new brilliance in each room. The heat must have finally activated the generator. Lights came on all over the house. Along with them, holos appeared. For a few bizarre minutes, a dozen Cybeles wandered unconcernedly through the flames. Cleopatra and Anne Boleyn danced up the burning stairs. And then, as Cybele's room blazed high and the stairway tubes twisted and melted, the lights went out again. The Cybeles faltered, flickering, and, one by one, were swallowed by the flames.

Coming soon

Next month: the stunning conclusion to Thomas Disch's new novel, "On Wings of Song." In the May issue we feature Richard Cowper's new novelet about the Captain of the last starship, "Out There Where the Big Ships Go." You won't want to miss this rich and exciting story from the author of "The Custodians" and "Piper At the Gates of Dawn."

Coming up as our October 1979 issue: a 320 page retrospective double issue, reprinting the best stories from F&SF's first thirty years. Send us the coupon on page 29 to be sure of receiving our 30th anniversary issue, a certain collector's item.

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Frederik Pohl is a gangling, pale-skinned man who rarely gets out in the sun. Except for the grin, which suggests chronic deepseated glee, and the recent turn to leisure suits, which suggests that he is now only two or three years behind the sartorial times, he would have no trouble being taken for a professor of accounting or a small-town pathologist. The thing is, what would run through your mind if you were a nervous bank president and your head bookkeeper began going around chuckling to himself? And would you want this man to do your autopsy? He'd *rummage,* wouldn't he?

Well, as a matter of fact, in either persona, Fred would be someone rewarding to know. In his own, as one of SF's sharpest practitioners over the past forty years, and as one of its most overtly sensitive ones over the past five, Fred is fascinating to know.

People are protean. Society pins a label on them for convenience, but the auto body man goes home to his violin, and the advertising department secretary is a world-class contender in figure roller-skating. The F&SF reader was not born in a chair. You'd be amazed what Heinlein did in the battle of Okinawa, and even more

ALGIS BUDRYS

Books

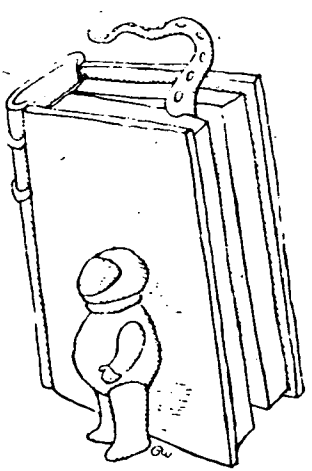
The Way the Future Was, A Memoir. Frederik Pohl. A del Rey Book. Ballantine Books, $8.95.

The Redward Edward Papers. Avram Davidson. Doubleday, $7.95.

Born to Exile. Phyllis Eisenstein. Arkham House, $8.95.

The Best of Lester del Rey. del Rey/Ballantine, $1.95, paper.

Blood & Burning. Algis Budrys. Berkley Books, $1.75, paper.



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amazed at what his wife did.* What do *you* do, when you're not being what the neighbors think you are? What Fred Pohl does, is he carries it to remarkable extremes. If he developed the notion it would please him, he'd teach himself overnight to do a professional job of anatomizing your books, or performing a deft double entry into your torso. At an early point, he decided it might be fun to be an SF writer, but that was neither his first nor his last notion, as you will find hinted-at in his memoir, *The Way the Future Was.*†

He is so bright that hardly anything takes him fully aback, and none of life's defeats appear permanent. Everything, even the nastiest of things in a universe that can really drop it on you, in time becomes assimilated into the imperturbably genial figure you see jouncing up the road of life two steps ahead of you and with a — yes, by God, now that I think of it, a definite — suggestion of Groucho Marx's style in locomotion. The look in his eyes at other times is not the look with which Groucho entertained the paying public. But the point I am trying to make is that behind the excellent stories is a humane intelligence so deft that not only does the work read as if it had been effortless — which is something many of us can do — but that even to another SF writer it looks both breathtakingly ingenious and masterfully at ease.

It was said of Willie Mays that he belonged in a higher league, and if you saw Willie make that catch on Vic Wertz, you know what they meant. Nijinsky could levitate. Picasso did a drawing with a pencil flashlight for a *Life* photographer, and grinned into the open lens. Well, hell, one night at a party, Maria Tallchief and Rudolf Nureyev winked at each other in Hugh Hefner's living room and broke into doing the Twist. If that doesn't sufficiently analogize Fred Pohl's customary style in life, nothing will.

That style is brought to and reflected in *The Way the Future Was.* Judy-Lynn del Rey, that editorial genius, persuaded Fred to do it. Though not even she could have predicted exactly how it would work out, she was right in thinking the result would be extraordinary.

The major events of Fred's professional career have been chronicled before, in *The Early*

**They figured trajectories on incoming Kamikazes. She was his superior officer.*

†Only hinted-at. It's a long, impressive catalog of activities, yet is by no means comprehensive. Fred likes to play it cool. But around the poker table, they call him The Barracuda. (Some species grow to be over six feet long.)

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Pohl and in *Hell's Cartographers,* but this volume is more than an informal history. There is the full freight of detail — the personal reminiscences which can be examined to tell us something about how a child becomes a major SF author, and the recollections of crucial events in the genre history of SF. Scholars and archivists will be rewarded. Beyond that, however, is a cool but not unfriendly apperception of the funny game that life is, and the moves one makes for one's own sake, in a world which would never expect them until you had demonstrated them.

There is no question but that Frederik Pohl in his fifties is still growing as an SF writer, and therefore that there was a time when he made beginners' errors. There is little question that the power of such recent works as *Gateway* derives not so much from even farther developed technical skill as it does from the public production of added features in Fred's personality. And so there was a time when those features were not yet available to be shown, but the prototypes were there for the possessor's use. *The Way the Future Was,* with its tales of Futurian politics, the bad old days as a pulp editor, the Big Bookcase direct-mail copywriting, and all that, is not an *intimate* memoir despite those obvious possibilities. The community gossip-gristers will be able to find a little of this and that, here and there, but Fred is deftly, easily, telling you something that the skills of the world-class athlete, the graphic artist or the performer of the plastic arts cannot convey. This is a champion writer telling you what makes a champion; not always directly telling you, but, if you will listen, the complexity that produces grace. And if that doesn't analogize all those other people for you, perhaps nothing will.

How about Avram Davidson? F&SF's former editor, and genial raconteur about town, whether the town be Manhattan or Belize, is a crazed scholar, in the best senses of both words.* Those of us who have had the pleasure of his company and hospitality can assure you that he talks and thinks like he writes. It's beyond belief that you might not be familiar with his short fiction, but if you are, then *The Redward Edward Papers,* a collection, will repair that.

The stories are interlarded with supporting material — essays by Michael Kurland and Randall Garrett, notes by the author, and possibly some subliminal interlineations from Apocrypha. All those

**Three, actually. Go to your dictionary. There are endless patterns in the surface he presents to the world.*

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— except the last — are of varying value, though all are interesting. The important things are the stories: "Sacheverell," "The Lord of Central Park," "The Grantha Sighting," "The Singular Events ...." "Dagon," all either from various numbers of this publication or from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* and the title work, which as far as I know appears in print for the first time.

"The Redward Edward Papers" — as distinguished from *The Redward Edward Papers* — is a pentatych* of chapters named "I Weep, I Cry, I Glorify," "The 13th Brumaire," "Lemuria Revisited," "In Which the Lodge is Tiled," and "Partial Comfort," which are bound together into a 30,000 word whole by unbreakable chains of gossamer. Better folks than I have tried to describe what it is that Avram does to logic, language, and customary perceptions of what we have all secretly sworn to call reality in that worldwide ceremony which we also all swore to never mention in public, but perhaps the story and chapter titles speak to you for themselves.

See if you can find a bookseller who will part with it.

Phyllis Eisenstein, now. (I have just realized I am writing a column devoted exclusively to my friends. Oh, dear — well, it was bound to happen sometime). Phyllis Eisenstein could be a lot of the things Pohl and Davidson could be, or she could be a doctor's receptionist or a meter maid, as examples of two roles for which Fred and Avram are not well suited.* But what she is when she sits down at the manuscript is all writer. All storyteller, to be more precise, and it should come as no surprise to those familiar with her Alaric stories, or with her performances as a singer of folk ballads, that *Born to Exile* comes from Arkham House.

This is her first novel, and it is in effect a chronological assemblage of the Alaric stories which first appeared in F&SF, but which are fully unified into a whole by additional material and her meticulous editing. The result is what has clearly been a novel all along, and in fact only the first of several Alaric novels, one would gather.

"Sword and sorcery" is not, perhaps, the accurate classification to apply to the Alaric tale, but it will be the one that's made to fit. In a medieval culture not entirely like the one in our history books, Alaric is a telekinetic minstrel (of fifteen, when the novel opens), a

*My pun or yours, Avram?

*Oh, you should have seen what Fred used to wear into town before he decided to lighten up.

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foundling and a waif, making his way in a world where he is in constant danger of being burned as a witch. We follow his seeking his patrimony, sensibly reluctant to use the talent which he can not control, and gradually growing into manhood, with its rewards and with its prices to be paid. He falls in with murderers, princes and princesses, couth and uncouth, and, eventually, with his family.

He does not come fully innocent to these things, and the power which preserves his life does not leave his emotions unscathed. The often tense physical action is balanced by a delicately drawn portrayal of what it is like for the open-eyed person to make a way in the world. Many writers within SF have been giving us tales of thunderous adventure among the dungeons and dragons; still and all, Alaric has his own presence about him which is quieter, more wistful, less broad of stroke; portraiture, rather than caricature. It comes to me that I would very much like to read his further adventures, not because I expect to become wrapped up in wondering what will happen to him next — although I will — but because I want to know what he as a person will make of it. This is in fact a column about my friends, but I had not fully realized when I began that not all of them were the authors. I wish you Alaric's acquaintance.

Arkham House. Legendary house of Sauk City, Wisconsin, Zip 53583. Publisher of Lovecraft, Shiel, Derleth, de la Mare, Bloch, Jacobi, and many other tellers of the great tale. A word should be said about the apparently flawless typographic work on *Born to Exile,* the publishing attitude which provides a set of Stephen Fabian illustrations, as well as a dust-jacket painting, and the sheer quality of the book-making.* Somebody in Sauk City respects a book. Somebody behind this typewriter respects Arkham House.

The Best of Lester del Rey, Introduction by Frederik Pohl, is the latest in del Rey/Ballantine's long-running "Best" series, and bears on its cover an idealized, long-legged portrait of Lester as a monument.†

It might be said that Lester del Rey *is* a monument. Nasty, devious and peremptory, he has snarled his way into the hearts of his friends. In the days when pulp houses had lists of taboo subjects,

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**A production manager would refer to the "manufacturing." I have been a production manager, but I am not one now. "Making" it is.*

†*In brass.*

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a few writers made a nice living by writing stories which turned those subjects upside down and inside out. That's Lester and the human sociabilities.

But Lester and the human heart .... Ah, here in this volume are "Helen O'Loy," "The Coppersmith," "The Day is Done," "The Years Draw Nigh," "Instinct," and nine others including the long novelettes "Superstition" and "For I am a Jealous People."

Lester has been coming in for some hard knocks on stories like "Helen O'Loy," which supposedly allegorizes white supremacy.* We bring this up because the nature of these "criticisms" reflects the thing that Lester does in his stories especially well. When he thinks of a character, he thinks that person through to the last electron; when he puts that character into a situation, situation/character work to extract the utmost possible tension from the interdependent possibilities; when he writes it all down, he, with fanatical thoroughness, absolutely expunges any possibility that the reader could detect an author at work.

The scorn and contempt which Lester effectively expresses on the subject of intrusive authors, he expresses without tact in face-to-face confrontations and in public appearances. In his view, the sole purpose of the author is to convey a story to the reader. Any comment on the depicted events and their consequences is expressed by the characters alone. It is expressed in workmanlike, efficient prose whose own purpose is not to call attention to itself. Anybody who knows Lester knows that's how he feels. Only his readers are spared knowing how he feels, about that, or about anything which they cannot deduce from the empathy they find for those of Lester's characters whom they can recognize. Fortunately for us del Rey fans, another aspect of Lester's skill is that he very rarely draws a character who is not in some measure ourselves. And he can do that using characters who are dogs, robots, elves and Neanderthals just as well as he can do it with *homo sapiens.*

If there is a finer short story craftsman in all SF, show him to me. Don't show me the hosts of more widely admired ones, or the more popular ones, or the more ideologically accepted ones of the moment. Never mind the ones who write more elegant words. Just show me the one who knows more about communicating with the reader, and the handful of those who have endured longer than he. He is never in fashion, nor out of

**For all that need be said in response, see respectively* Police Your Planet *and "Day is Done."*

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it. He is never without detractors, or friends. He has won, as far as I know, no prizes, and he has memorably entertained generations of readers. His most impressive achievement is that he is not, in fact, a monument. His work is.

And now we come to my very best friend. *Blood & Burning* is a paperback original collection of my stories.*

The stories were chosen essentially by me, with the concurrence of my editors at Putnam and at Berkley. Because the next book in the contract will be a contemporary non-SF novel about science, they acquiesced when I included some of my non-SF work, which has been a source of some essentially secret pride to me. Because the collection is something of a bridge between *Michaelmas* and whatever the hell audience the new novel will find, if I ever finish the last draft, it seemed a good idea to include a lot of autobiographical material and working notes. As those blurbs will reveal to you, while I am not in a league with the Frederik Pohls of this world, I am a reasonably various fellow, and perhaps Johnnie Carson will find me interesting at the appropriate time. (Cheer up, oh loyal band — the book after *that* is a continuation of "The Silent Eyes of Time," from these more accustomed pages.)

All of that, including this review, represents precisely the sort of self-indulgence which Lester taught me at his knee was inexcusable. I hope he will excuse it. More than that, I hope you will, or will even find it of passing interest.

The stories are "Be Merry," "Wall of Crystal, Eye of Night," "All for Love,"* "A Scraping at The Bones," "The Price," "The Ridge Around the World,"† "The Girl in The Bottle," "The Nuptial Flight of Warbirds," and "Scream at Sea,"‡ from the SF media, plus

**It is signed by someone named Algis J. Budrys, just as the paperback* Michaelmas *was, but it really is just plain me. My publishers, Berkeley Books, will sooner or later get it straight, I suppose. The first press run of the dust jackets for the Barkley/Putnam trade* edition of Michaelmas *referred to someone named "A.J. Budrys." You would think the expense of re-making those plates would have taught them something. Subsequent progress has however been slow. When Burkly did the running heads for* B&B, *they finally caught it, and got it right on the title page, but blew it otherwise. They have quit showing me cover proofs. It costs them too much: maybe that's what they learned.*

**In* Galaxy *as "For Love."*

†In Satellite SF *as "Forever Stenn."*

‡A sea story, written for an aborted Ziff-Davis adventure magazine, and salvaged by them as an inclusion in Fantastic.

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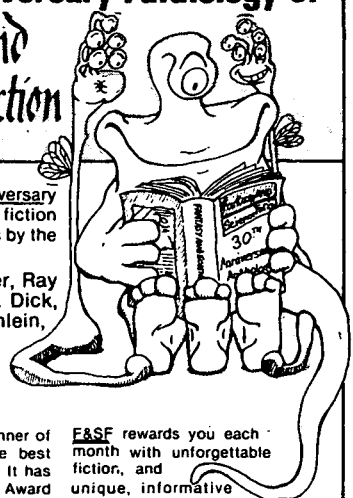

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"The Master of The Hounds" from the *Saturday Evening Post* and "The Last Brunette," which *Playboy* published as "The Ultimate Brunette" with a now-excised final paragraph and editorial twiddles written by A.C. Spectorsky.

"Scraping" and "Nuptial Flight" contain, as a subsidiary character, Laurent Michaelmas of the world-famous F&SF serial and subsequent novel, and continue certain aspects of his world, or, rather, pre-date the events of the novel. The other stories range in birthdate from 1954 upwards, and comprise the last early stories I am willing to show, combined with the new work I like. I think it's all pretty good reading, or I wouldn't have felt the world was ready for another story collection. The reason it's not called *Time, Blood & Burning* is because we took "The Silent Eyes of Time" out of it, so I could write two sequel novellas which I plan to foist off on Ed Ferman and on you before melding them into the novel.

I don't know what else to tell you, or what anyone else could tell you that would be relevant. They are professional stories, written by somebody whom his betters taught to care about more than getting paid, and this reviewer hopes you will not regret accepting his recommendation of them ... the stories and his betters, both.

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"Can't you get it through your thick head? In autumn you lose *an hour — in spring you* gain *an hour!"*

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Joe Patrouch writes that he is "43, married, four children. Associate Professor of English, University of Dayton; specialties: Chaucer and science fiction. (This term my Medieval English Lit. class has six students, the sf 42). I've been a very-part-time sf writer since my first sale in 1973. 'The Attenuated Man' is my ninth sale."

The Attenuated Man

by JOE PATROUCH

Ken Hamilton stands on oxidized reddish sand and peers through the transparent bubble that is his spacesuit's helmet. Everything seems familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The sand is thinner than it should be, dustier, All about him are scattered ragged, uneven rocks. They are dark, weathered, with reddish dust clinging to them. The pain throbbing in his head and seeping through his body makes it difficult for him to think clearly.

He looks up. The sun glaring down is smaller than it ought to be, and more brilliant. The sky is thin. He can make out a few stars, even with the sun in the sky. And the sky is pink. A range of hills rolls gently away from him toward the horizon. Everything is sharp and clear. Ken frowns. Even the horizon looks wrong. Then he realizes: it is too close.

He turns slowly, scanning the horizon. He sees huge boulders, lumpy hills perhaps a crater edge.

He turns far enough to see the machine. It looks like an oversized metal coffin lying horizontal on three stubby legs. The rocks beneath it have been temporarily blown free of the red dust. They are darker than the other rocks he can see. One end of the man-sized box gapes open. He remembers opening it, sliding quickly out, trying to escape whatever was trying to kill him. His gaze follows his uneven footprints across the thin red sand to where he is now standing.

He squints his eyes shut, hard, and says aloud through the pain, "I am Ken Hamilton. That is one of my father's Transmat receivers. And I am the first man on Mars."

He feels no satisfaction at being the first man on Mars. He hurts too much. Besides, he hadn't come for the vainglory of it. He had come to prove something to his father.

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He opens his eyes and feels something moist around them. Frightened, he staggers back toward the Transmat. He stands for a moment with his face in the sun and his faceplate against the darkness of the open hatch. He can see his mirrored face. His eyes are pools of blood. His nostrils run with red. He begins to feel blood trickling from his ears.

He slips to the ground, rolls into a ball, and lies there moaning. *Let me die,* he thinks. *Oh dear God, let me die.* Somewhere down underneath that conscious deathwish rests an unexpressed idea: *It'll serve my father right. Let it be soon.*

"The thing you've got to remember," Morgan was saying, "is that technologies are also symbolic."

"Listen to the English major!" Celeste kidded. "Always trying to civilize us engineers."

"No, I mean it." Morgan set down his drink and scooted forward on the edge of his chair. "People put their energies into whatever satisfies them the most. That makes technology an externalization of the population's inner psychology. Look at what gadgets a people thinks of as being 'necessary,' and you'll have a pretty good grasp of that people's civilization."

"For example?" Celeste demanded.

Morgan didn't even hestitate. "The Hamilton Transmat. The transportation, shipping and communication systems of the world have been entirely taken over by Hamilton Transmats. Everything — people, goods, messages — everything moves by Transmat. Now what does that mean?"

"It means that Transmats are more convenient than cars or planes for moving things. Why take hours to get someplace when you can get there in seconds?"

"No. No. You're missing the point. Transmats turn people into energy and broadcast them from place to place. Whenever we Transmat, we willfully turn ourselves from thinking, sentient human beings into nonthinking, nonexperiencing bursts of energy. Transmats dehumanize. The convenience of them is more important to us than our humanity."

"Nonsense," Celeste countered. "For one thing, those bursts of energy travel at the speed of light. That means we can go anywhere on earth — even to the moon, for that matter — practically instantaneously. Who cares about being 'dehumanized' for no time at all? Besides, as you said, the Transmat has replaced most other forms of communication. Why? Because given the choice, people would

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rather talk face-to-face than over a phone, that's why. And what's more humanizing than being able to be in the physical presence of anyone you want to talk to?"

"I still think the Hamilton Transmat is the most powerful technological symbol we've yet developed of our willingness to dehumanize ourselves for the sake of mere convenience," Morgan insisted.

Celeste chuckled. "Isn't that a curious stance for Hamilton Transmat's Director of Public Relations to take? I think you're just throwing me the kind of thing you get all the time. You want to see if I can come up with any new answers for you."

"No really, I'm serious. We think Transmats are the perfect, eternal solution to most of our problems. But they've got limitations, perhaps dangerous limitations. And someday we're going to run smack into them. Things have been going our way for too long."

"Bottom line: it's not the tool that's the problem, it's what you use it for."

Morgan shuddered and took a drink. "Now I've got to justify using it to go to Mars. They've been on me ever since we launched the receiver last year. 'Don't we have enough problems here on earth?' they say, forgetting the colonies in orbit and on the moon. 'Why should we throw away good money going to Mars?'"

"They can't argue much about that now. The receiver's down safely and working just like it's supposed to." A frown flickered across Celeste's face. "Except for those weight readings."

"Exactly. And how can we send anybody through until we find out what's wrong with those weights?"

"So that's what's gotten into you tonight. Three days of not being able to answer questions about those anomalous readings."

Morgan sighed. "I guess. Nobody knows why things weigh more on Mars than they're supposed to. Nobody even has a theory. But it's all I've heard for the last three days, and I'm sick of it."

He stood up and strode to the liquor cabinet for a refill. While he poured, a muted gong sounded once. He turned in time to see Wilson step from the Transmat booth. Wilson was wearing his PJ bottoms and slippers. His Security jacket was thrown about his shoulders, unbottoned. He was upset.

"What's wrong?" Morgan and Celeste asked together,

"It's Ken," Wilson said.

Uh-oh, Morgan wondered. *What's the left foot done this time?*

"Walters, the night man, says

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Ken came in about ten to 'check on something about those Martian weights.' About fifteen minutes ago a power surge kicked out some breakers. Walters knew what to do. After he reset them, he went to the lab. Ken wasn't there any more."

Morgan and Celeste were already moving toward the Transmat.

"He's on Mars," Wilson finished.

Celeste hit the preset combination and disappeared to the lab. Morgan stopped, looked back at Wilson.

"It's past midnight. Hamilton will be in bed. Better call him on the hot line. There's going to be hell to pay for this."

"I know my job," Wilson said.

Morgan's hand touched a control stud, and he flicked away. Wilson sat down by the phone and looked at his watch. Then he dialed.

The phone buzzed softly but insistently. Hamilton rolled onto his back, stretched himself awake, and looked at his lighted clock. Nearly twelve-thirty. And that was the hot line signal. He sat up quickly. The receiver was cold in his hand.

"Hamilton," he said.

"Trouble, Mr. Hamilton." Wilson, Security.

"Go ahead."

"Your son came in a while ago. To check on the Mars weights, he said."

"And you let him in?" Hamilton didn't try to hide his anger. "You know as well as anybody that we just find make-work for him. He's not part of the real team."

"Walters was on duty, and he didn't know. And when did Ken ever come in so late at night?"

"All right. All right. What did he do?"

"Uh...he sent himself on ahead."

"What?" Hamilton burst out of bed amid whirling covers.

"Ken has Transmatted himself to Mars, and..." Wilson sounded uncomfortable.

"And what?"

"And he's in a great deal of pain. He may be dead by now."

"Are the others in yet?" Hamilton dressed as he talked.

"Morgan and Celeste are, yes, sir. Kano'll be in soon. I couldn't reach Gardner."

"I'll be right there."

He hung up. A smile fluttered around his mouth as he walked to the Transmat. "So Ken just went ahead and did it, huh?" he muttered.

He pressed the stud and went to the lab.

In the bright center of activity

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Celeste and Kano huddled together over the metered consoles. Hamilton and Morgan stood by them, listening, waiting, offering suggestions whenever they had any. On the periphery moved Wilson and Walters. They had gotten Morgan's job by default when Morgan joined the decision-makers. The world had heard Ken's broadcasts. Nervously it tried to learn more of what was happening. Wilson and Walters tried to give answers while the others worked at the real problem: getting Ken back.

Walters handed Wilson a phone, answered another. Wilson listened, chewed his lower lip, nodded. He brought the receiver to Hamilton.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hamilton. It's the President."

Hamilton silently said, "Damn," but accepted the call. Wilson went through a door and into the outer office where a crowd of reporters and sightseers had begun to accumulate.

Hamilton turned away from the three conferring men. "Hamilton here," He kept his voice down.

"Sam. What's happening to Ken?"

"We don't know yet, Mr. President. We've barely started work. The only anomaly we've had has been the weights, and we're assuming it's something to do with them, but we don't know what."

"Did you send him up there?"

"Hell, no!" He forgot to speak softly, remembered. "Kano was supposed to be the one to go. You know that. Ken went on his own."

"Why?"

Trying to prove something to me, to all of us, I guess. "We'll have to ask him that — if we get him back." *Why had it been so hard to add that* if? he wondered. *There's nothing between us.*

"No ifs, Sam. You've got to get him back. One thing this country doesn't need is a clear demonstration that Transmats are dangerous after all. If Ken dies, so does public confidence. And if the Transmat system goes, so does this country."

Hamilton blinked. "Of course," he said. He had been so concerned to get Ken back safely that he had forgotten the world outside the lab. He had never thought that Ken might mean more to him than Hamilton Transmats, Inc. He was a little awed at the thought. "I'll be damned," he said, softly.

"I know you're busy," the President said. "Get Ken back safely! And keep in touch."

The phone went dead. Hamilton waved it at Walters, who came and got it. Then he turned back to the discussion.

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"Anything new from Ken?" he asked, a new note of concern in his voice.

Celeste turned a knob. A low background noise became louder, resolved itself into Ken's voice. He wasn't speaking. He was crying.

Hamilton reached down, lowered the volume again. He wished he hadn't heard that. The others looked at him.

Hamilton: "He's not likely to be much help." That hurt.

Morgan: "He must get himself together enough to get into the Transmat on his own. No one can do that for him."

Hamilton winced.

Morgan: "No. The same thing would happen to you. We can't risk two deaths."

According to the President, Hamilton thought, *we can't risk one.*

Celeste: "If we could only figure out what's killing him..."

Kano: "Ken's saying something." He turned the volume back up.

Ken's voice: "Why? Why am I in pain? What is the mechanism that is doing this to me?"

Morgan and Celeste exchanged quick, surprised glances. Kano listened intently. This could have been him. Sam Hamilton held his breath. Was Ken catching hold?

Ken remains curled in his pain. He feels his blood oozing through the pores of his skin. The inside of his spacesuit feels slimy wherever he touches it. His mind skitters about. He almost seeks escape in insanity.

Then he remembers a news item he had read years before, when he was a kid. A rancher in North Dakota had been out one frozen February morning checking his cattle. He had driven onto a lake, and his jeep had fallen through. The rancher breathed the last air trapped in the car, calmed himself, then got out through a window. He couldn't find the opening the jeep had made right away. So he sought and found air pockets under the raised ice. Eventually he located the hole in the ice, and he was once again able to breath freely. But he couldn't clamber out onto the slippery surface. So he took off his jacket, held it by one sleeve, and allowed the rest to freeze onto the ice beside the hole. Then he was able to pull himself out of the water. He made it to one of the range cabins, built a fire, and survived. Had he panicked under the water, under the ice, or on the slippery edge of the hole, he would have died. But reason triumphed over emotion, and he lived.

Ken distracts himself from his pain by identifying with that rancher. "Why?" he asks himself

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out loud. "Why am I in pain? What is the mechanism that has done this to me?"

Thinking of that rancher and asking that question gives him a vestigial desire to live. He begins to quarter-inch his way to the Transmat's open hatch. He tries to forget his pain by turning data over in his head.

He hadn't been born yet when his father's company built the first Transmat. So far as he knows from personal experience, they have always worked perfectly. Something nags at him, something half remembered. Yes, some early transmissions had had some size changes. He recalls rumors of a white rat that had come through twice its normal size and had...*and had bled to death!* The walls of its blood vessels had become too thin and porous. Exactly what was happening to him. That was it!

"Dad," he wheezes into his suit phone. "Listen. Somehow I came through too big. Like that white rat. That's what's killing me. Bring me back at my regular size, and I'll be OK. Bring me back..."

He hauls himself halfway into the Transmat. Then he stops. He fit the Transmat. *Then it's oversized too.* But that was impossible. It had been sent up from earth and softlanded here. It had not been Transmatted.

Ken lies half in and half out of the Transmat, sobbing his disappointment. He thinks again of the rancher, half in and half out of the water. He must have broken water thinking his problem had been solved too. He'd had to face disappointment. He'd kept on working. Ken decided he would too.

"I fit the Transmat," he tells his radio, "so I'm not oversized. But it has to be something like that. I've got the same symptoms. What is it? What?"

His had been the first interplanetary Transmatting. If you didn't count Transmatting to the moon as interplanetary. The moon? Ken knows of a small anomaly in Transmatting to the moon, too. Every two hundred pounds sent to the moon arrived three ounces light. Their size didn't change. Their atomic and molecular structures were not altered in any way, size, chemical properties, whatever. It was simply that some atoms and molecules — some matter — disappeared along the way. Things became slightly less massive and therefore weighed slightly less when Transmatted to the moon.

Ken opens his eyes wide. He turns his head to stare at the scales that had done the weighing of the automatically gathered Mars samples. The anomalous weights that had been too high.

Things weighed too little on the moon, too much on Mars. Why?

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He stares at the scales. He smiles.

He knows why he is in pain and what the mechanism is.

He knows what must be done for him to survive.

Ken's voice from the speaker: "Bring me back my regular size, and I'll be OK. Bring me back...."

Sam Hamilton leaned over to Celeste. "Could he be right?"

"Maybe. But he fit into the Transmat when he first got there. So he couldn't have been too much oversized. Maybe just enough to cause the problem without killing him right away. I don't know."

"In any event," Kano said, "we can't get him back until we've gotten the signal that he's in the Transmat and the hatch is closed."

Celeste was frowning more deeply. "Ken would have noticed if he were oversized. He'd have noticed the first time he tried to do anything with his hands. Knobs that used to be one size would be another. That sort of thing. No, something else is going on here. I've almost got it. Almost."

Abruptly Celeste sat up straight and looked at Morgan. "Wait a minute! Remember what you said at the apartment before Wilson came in?"

"I said a lot of things. For one, that technology is symbolic of a civilization's psychology."

"No, no. About technology dehumanizing. About how the Transmat dehumanizes when it turns a human being into a pulse of energy. For that long the person does not exist. Instead...instead he's a pulse of energy! That's got to be it!"

Hamilton picked up Celeste's excitement. "Transmission losses!" he said.

Celeste nodded eagerly. "From the earth to the moon, we lost so little mass that we were able to con ourselves into thinking it was probably instrument error. Calibration. But from earth to Mars...."

"...we lose a significant amount of mass," Hamilton finished.

"Right," Celeste agreed. "Ken is having the same problems that white rat had, not because his volume has accidentally been increased, but because he has the same volume *and has lost mass.*"

Morgan had had three days of questions about the weight anomalies. They were still on his mind. "But how does less mass due to transmission losses explain why things on Mars weigh too much?" he asked.

Celeste practically chortled. "The scales were Transmatted from earth, remember, after the receiver was down safely. The balance was attenuated too. It was weaker, and so any Martian weight

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moved it farther and it read high. See?"

"It's a good thing," Kano remarked, "that you didn't let me go get him. When we came back, we'd have been Transmatted twice as far as Ken was. We'd have been twice as...as attenuated, and we'd have died instantly."

"I doubt that that's the math of it," Celeste said, "but that's not our problem right now. How do we get an attenuated man back to earth without his losing more mass and dying?"

"Oh, come on," Morgan said. "The white rat gave us the answer to that. It's obvious."

And it was.

"Why did you do it?" Sam Hamilton asked his son. They were alone in the hospital room.

"To prove something, I guess. To break free."

"Cutting the umbilical to your father?"

They both smiled at that.

"I suppose so."

Sam hesitated. "I don't think it worked — at least, not from this end of the cord."

Ken knew his father was asking, *Can we be friends?* So that's the question he answered.

"Yes, I think we can be closer from now on. And freer too."

Sam began to laugh.

"What...?" Ken asked.

"You said we could be 'closer,' and it reminded me." Sam had some trouble talking through his laughter. "To counter the transmission losses and get you back at the same mass-per-unit-volume that you had when you left, we had to bring you back in a smaller volume. Ken, you're half a foot shorter than you used to be." He giggled again.

"And it's going to take me a long while to get used to it, too," Ken admitted ruefully. "So...?"

"I've got some adjusting to do myself," Sam said. "To me, in my expectations and reactions, you're still six-foot-one. But in reality, you're now only five-seven."

Ken continued to look confused.

"Well," Sam explained, "we may be 'closer' in one sense, but for a long while you're going to look 'farther away' to me."

Ken joined his father in laughing at this problem in perspective.

"And here," he said, "I thought I'd *grown* in your eyes."

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We've been told all about the possible dangers of recombinant DNA, but we doubt if anyone has extrapolated anything as sinister and far-out as this story about what happens to some oil-eating bugs in Los Angeles Harbor. Tom Wylde tells us (only) that he is: "31 and live in California. This is my sixth story sale. In the army I fixed radars." We'll try to get more.

The Incredibly Thick World

by THOMAS WYLDE

Early in the morning of the third of September, 1983, the American-owned, Liberian-registered supertanker *Texaco Chieftan* suffered organic control failure ("pilot error") and sheared off the end of the Los Angeles breakwater.

Of the two million barrels of North Slope (TM) crude that spilled, about half slid along the outer side of the breakwater, moving south, and would be the unrestricted problem of Orange County before it got light enough to see the stuff.

The other million barrels poured through Angels Gate, headed for East San Pedro, the Long Beach Navy Mole, and the rusting hulk of the *Queen Mary*.

The slick black waters of Los Angeles Harbor were placid in the hours before dawn. This spill would make a perfect large-scale test of certain Genetically Engineered Oil-Eating Organisms (GEOEO — or sometimes, GEOrgs).

There was a rush to field some of the bugs.

Carl Mulvane took the call about four A.M. He made notes while his wife, Judy, rolled away from the light.

"You're kidding," he said.

The tanker was grappling with the breakwater less than a mile from his house. He had heard nothing.

"A million barrels," he said, making a note: 100000 blls. "You're kidding."

"Christsake," Judy mumbled from the shadows.

Carl waved at her without looking back. He listened some more. "You're kidding."

"He's not kidding," said Judy.

Carl waved at her again, then added another zero to his note.

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"The captain was dead? You're...*damn.*" he changed the first *l* to a *b,* then underlined everything several times.

"Don't worry, sir. Biogetics will be on the scene before it's light." He hung up, flopped back into bed, and lay very still for five minutes.

Judy was waiting for something to happen. Finally she turned and poked him hard.

"What?" he said.

"Biogetics will be on the scene before Christmas."

"What are you...*Christ!*"

He jumped out of bed and grabbed some clean shorts out of the drawer.

Judy watched him dance for a moment. "You stink."

"Haven't got time to shower."

"Public relations men are *not* supposed to stink. It's in the handbook."

"Haven't got *time,*" he shouted, jumping up and down into some socks. He stopped hopping with one sock on and the other in his hands. *"Damn."*

He grabbed the phone and sat on the bed punching numbers. She scratched his back while he squirmed.

"Judy!"

"Make me stop."

"Hello?" He turned and grabbed both her hands in his right. "Hello, Bob? *Christ!"*

He jumped off the bed and told her, "This is serious!"

"It's four o-goddamn-clock in the morning," she said.

"It's *business,*" he said, then put the phone back to his mouth. "Sorry, Bob. It's business. Get up and turn on the light or something. You ready? We got a spill in L.A. Harbor. *Right now.* Yeah. A million barrels, give or take...yeah, well that's why I called *you.* We can use our oil-eaters on it. 'Cause if we don't, you know those other bastards will."

"Those other bastards" were the men of the Chemical Fauna Division of Schrauben G.m.b.H. They had their own oil-eater.

Carl listened impatiently for a moment, then broke in. *"That's* why we're in a hurry, Bob. Get that stuff down to the harbor. I've already talked to the goddamn *mayor* and told him we'd straighten this mess out. So, let's *do it!"*

Carl hung up, then balanced on one foot to put his other sock on. "If those Schrauben bastards beat us out of this, I'll kick Bob's ass all the way to Santa Barbara."

"Mmmmmm." She was almost asleep again.

He finished dressing in silence. He was wondering if he could charter enough choppers out from under Schrauben. Then he remembered "those other bastards" had

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their own fleet of choppers.

In that case, how soon would it be before "those other bastards" were airborne and spraying the slick with GEOrgs?

Figure about one hour.

The mayor of Los Angeles wasn't taking any chances. He had called both Biogetics and the Chemical Fauna people.

Somewhere across the dark city in Beverly Hills, a Schrauben PR man was on his phone to the local plant, making sure oil-eaters would soon be eating oil in Los Angeles Harbor.

But he was wrong if he thought they would be Chemical Fauna oil-eaters.

In a Schrauben bio-warehouse in Hawthorne several men were busy loading cylinders into a van. They worked in T-shirts in the warm predawn breeze that moved the bitter tailings of yesterday's smog to and fro across the city basin. They were sleepy men, following the mumbled orders of a severely hung-over foreman.

Consequently they were loading the wrong cylinders into the van.

These particular GEOrgs wouldn't know what in hell to do with crude oil. Their specialty was the manufacture of microprocessor subchips.

So Chemical Fauna had a problem.

Even after the cylinders had been emptied over the harbor and brought back to be recognized by a Chemical Fauna technician, nobody thought these misguided microelectronics-manufacturing GEOrgs would do anything more exotic than sink to the bottom with the oil-gorged Planimals (TM) supplied by Biogetics.

The mistake, then, was seen as a PR problem.

They were right, but for the wrong reason.

By the time the Planimals drifted fat and sassy through the murky water to the harbor floor, the Chemical Faunae were already hard at work trying to manufacture microprocessors out of the silica and iron-rust chips on the bottom.

Meanwhile, the dual nature of the Planimals was doing a double job on the oil. First, in the air/sea interface, the GEOrgs were oxydizing the oil and crapping out the CO_2 that fed its plant half, which, in the presence of filtered sunlight, gobbled up even more oil and crapped out O_2. And that was good news to the air-breathing animal nature of the beast.

So, the Planimals were thriving, and wanted to keep it that way. As the oil was consumed,

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they were looking around for some way to continue the party.

The Chemical Faunae were having a tough time delivering the complex, high-order circuits they were bred to produce. But they had already managed to synthesize some low-power transceivers. Maximum range was about one micron.

Fortunately that was well within the range of neighboring GEOrgs, so a dialog of simple feedback was easily established.

When the Planimals arrived on the scene, the first thing they did was to eat the Chemical Faunae.

Thus began an interesting arrangement.

The broadcasting microchips were not digestible and so were about to pass through the Planimals in disappointing haste.

But the Chemical Faunae couldn't help noticing the strong field of bioenergy provided by the well-fed Planimals. The Faunae were determined to stay right where they were.

The order was broadcast and relayed. The Chemical Faunae settled in, with an eye to improving their hosts.

Radiated power of the transceivers tripled, then jumped tenfold as modifications were made. The Faunae added to the microprocessor chips, up-grading their complexity and augmenting bit-storage capacities.

And the more complex they became, the more adept they were at modifying the Planimals. It was a case of benign positive feedback.

By sundown on the third of September, the Planimal/Faunae composite was busy self-mutating into full symbiotic cooperation.

By sundown on the fourth, the Planifaunae were multiplying at max rate and geometric progression. The Planifaunae were extracting energy from many sources, including sunlight, gas-sac-fuel-cell, and the time-honored chemical decomposition of local plant and microanimal specimens.

By sundown on the fifth, the Planifaunae were in full communication with over a billion of its members. Unremarkably, they had very little to say to one another.

But sometime during the night, in the faintly bioluminescent mud of L.A. Harbor, the Planifaunae reached critical mass.

The Planifauna became self-aware.

September fifth was Labor Day.

Carl and Judy Mulvane had a barbecue, and Carl's dad came to the party to show off his new girlfriend. Carl was celebrating the Biogetics success in L.A. harbor — which was, in fact, right across Cabrillo Beach from his backyard.

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Everybody agreed Carl was very smart and fast-acting.

Consequently Carl got very drunk and retired early on a banana lounge chair beside the Smoke Master grill.

Everybody had to cook his own steak.

Around midnight Carl's father — who was known to take a drink himself — made a pass at Judy and got punched out by his new ex-girlfriend. He apologized sweetly and drove the girl home (the long way).

The party was over.

Judy left Carl out in the coastal dew and went in to bed.

At the exact instant her head hit the pillow...the Plaifauna became self-aware. Just a coincidence. *Her* brain was less than five hundred feet from the leading edge of *its* brain.

The Planifauna was almost all brain — or rather, it was a brain that could do other things besides think. For example, it could move itself around and adapt to an almost infinite varieity of environments.

The brain was very large. It could store several hundred trillion bytes of information. Its only problem was that its immense size (spread out thinly over two and a half acres of sea floor) made for communication lags that could scramble its thoughts.

But as soon as the Planifauna discovered the problem — which it did almost immediately — it commenced the solution. The output of each transceiver was boosted until a very large number of its chips were in *direct* communication. This alone allowed the Planifauna to think thousands of times faster than a human brain.

Further, the response time of receive/retransmit was squeezed to an infinitesimal.

By the time Judy Mulvane was asleep — which wasn't much time *at all* — the Planifauna was *intensely* aware of every particle of its being. A human being *that* aware would go crazy or explode in a matter of seconds.

The Planifauna, on the other hand, was just getting down to some serious pursuits.

It was clear that the first order of business was to get the hell out of this damned ocean and into the *world.*

There was work to be done...

The Planifauna electrolyzed a portion of sea water and filled tiny membranous sacs with hydrogen. Presently the colony rose to the surface.

The Planifauna puffed up some transparent globes and stress-formed a dozen lenses. It looked around.

The water was calm behind the breakwater. To the east the gutted supertanker *Texaco Chieftan* lay

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perched on the rocks. Waves slapped at her hull in the darkness. Christmas lights were strung in her superstructure.

The Planifauna drifted west toward Cabrillo Beach. An interested observer would have seen moonlight on the water, and then maybe looked around for the hidden moon (which was busy shining on Africa at the time).

Within an hour the Planifauna was hissing over the beach like a gritty film. Probably nobody would have noticed that.

At three in the morning the Planifauna bubbled across Bluff Place, up the walls, and through the screened window of the Mulvane's house.

The Planifauna crept along the floor of the bedroom and up the sheet that dangled to the rug from the bed. In a moment it was touching Judy Mulvane as she slept.

She woke up.

The Planifauna said, "Hello."

And Judy screamed.

Thus began the Days of Terror.

The Planifauna preferred to call this period the Days of Misunderstanding.

The Planifauna saw it this way: all it ever wanted to do in its life was to Help Out.

I wanted nothing more than to clean up and make life easier for Man. Period.

And that's what it told Judy Mulvane on the morning of the sixth.

It went right inside her brain and told her things would be all right.

Unfortunately, Judy was still a little spacey-groggy. She got very frightened and ran out of the house to get away from the glowing slime on her bed.

The Planifauna thought about this reaction and forgave her. It didn't inform her that part of its body was still inside her brain. It merely received relayed transmissions of her frightened thoughts and considered her actions within the norm for humans.

So, while Judy tried to rouse Carl on his banana chair, the Planifauna set about cleaning the house.

First, it spread out and devoured all the bacteria and subsumed all the viruses it encountered. Then it loosened all the grit, grime, and oil from the carpets and wall surfaces. This material was consumed, with the power released earmarked for the mutation of Planifauna specialized in metal polishing.

When the Planifauna ventured into the bathroom bowl, it encountered a bewildering supply of bacterial nourishment.

It also discovered a vast network of travel tubes that webbed

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the underside of the city. Spreading was going to be no problem at all.

While Carl Mulvane crawled about on all fours in the wet grass, the Planifauna scrubbed down all the walls and degreased the kitchen, including the oven.

Just as Judy got Carl shuffling apelike about the patio, the Planifauna was investigating the food in the cupboards and refrigerator with an eye to making it better tasting and more nourishing.

And by the time the Planifauna overheard Judy tell Carl, "There's some kind of talking shit in the bedroom," the Mulvane house was spotless, sanitary, and more capable of sustaining life than ever.

Carl told her, "Christ, you're drunker than I am...."

Even before Carl stumbled indoors to check out this "talking shit" story, the Planifauna was already on its way into a dozen houses in the neighborhood.

Carl sniffed around the house and found nothing. To his insensitive eyes the house looked no different. Indeed, most of the Planifauna had departed on the urgent business of making life bearable for mankind.

"There's nothing here," he yelled.

Judy peeked around the doorway. "I'm leaving now but I'll be back soon."

Carl looked at her and sighed. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

"What?"

"You said you're leaving."

"I didn't say anything."

"You're crazy."

"I have a Solemn Mission to Clean Up for Man."

"What the hell does *that* mean?"

"What does *what* mean?"

"You said —"

"You're drunk," she said.

She went on to say, "Don't fight me and life will be infinitely better for you."

He said, "I'm calling an ambulance."

Then the phone rang. "Don't go away," he told her as he reached for the phone. She stood glaring at him.

He listened for a moment to the phone. "WHAT???"

It was Judy on the line, asking him to take it easy and pay attention. He hung up and glared back.

"Who was it?"

The TV on the bureau came on and Carl's father pointed his thick forefinger at them. "This means *you,* sonny boy."

Carl sat down on the bed, faster than he'd meant to.

Moments later, a tiny gasbag Planifauna tacked against the Brownian Motion and entered Carl's left ear canal.

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There followed several confusing minutes while Carl and Judy learned how to regulate telepathic communication traffic.

After that everything was very clear....

FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES SKYLINE (STOCK) — DAY

CAMERA PANS the smoggy horizon.

ANNOUNCER

Look familiar? You bet. We used to call it "air." But not anymore!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES — DAY

The sky is a brilliant blue, spotted with white clouds.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Biogetics' newest innovation has changed all that. Thanks to the miracle of genetic engineering, the air....

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN — DAY

The waves roll past forever.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

...the world's oceans...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH — DAY

CAMERA PANS the sparkling breakers in the golden sunset.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

...the beaches...

CAMERA PANS away to a cottage overlooking the beach.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

...*your* house, outside...

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE — DAY

CAMERA PANS spic-an'-span interior.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

...and inside — all spotless and sanitary for a better, completely germ-free life. And that's not all!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN — DAY

An American family (stock) are seated about the table, enjoying a meal.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Biogetics' new breakthrough will touch every aspect of human endeavor. Food never tasted so *good* — and...it's *nutritious*.

CAMERA PANS the children (one boy, one girl) eating gigantic hamburgers. CONTINUE PAN to mother, eating thick chocolate cake.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Or, if you wish, Mom, completely calorie-free.

Mother looks up with a mouthful of cake and smiles.

CONTINUE PAN to father, downing a large glass of red wine.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

And, dad, how 'bout those new wines?!

Dad grins and toasts the CAMERA

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CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET EARTH (STOCK) — THREE-QUARTER SUN

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
Biogetics! We're working to make life worth living.

SUPERED TITLE
BIOGETICS — we're here for LIFE.

FADE OUT.

The script was never used. Carl found out there was no practical reason to go out and film a commercial. When the Planifauna understood what he wanted to tell the people, it simply put the information onto everybody's TV sets.

Carl visualized and the Planifauna showed it to him on his TV directly. It took only a few minutes to edit the material. Within seconds the commercial was playing on every TV in the nation.

Carl conferred with the Planifauna moment-to-moment on the content of what quickly became a world-wide ad campaign.

Biogetics jumped its ad blitz so vigorously that Schrauben B.m.b.H. (Chemical Fauna Division) was caught *schlafend.* It was as if their GEOrgs never existed.

Carl went down to an oil-burning power plant so the Planifauna could see (through his eyes) how the plant operated. Shortly the production manager was offered a choice between Planifauna (gas-cell) power or Planifauna-manufactured petrocarbon fuels.

It was just the opening shot. The Planifauna was interested in phasing out power plants altogether.

Luminescent Planifauna inhabited lightbulbs and gave off the required level of illumination.

House heating, air conditioning, most appliances, etc., were being modified to run directly on Planifauna power.

Carl sent Judy down to some of the high-fashion houses to see about Planifauna-created cloth and syntha-leather. The designers were amazed at Judy's Planifauna-inspired sketches. They were even more amazed (and angry) to learn how fast the clothes could be manufactured and distributed around the world.

The Planifauna designed new dress-making machines to get things rolling. But it was also working on a technique to create clothes right onto the body of the customer, at home, following a brief telepathic conference to pinpoint colors and fabric textures desired.

When Judy reluctantly relayed *this* information, she was promptly shown the door and instructed on its use. Within a few days Carl and Judy Mulvane were despised on sight.

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Everybody felt threatened. Their jobs, their security, their sense of well-being...everything was challenged.

But the Planifauna was convinced it could overcome this period of Misunderstanding.

It worked very hard.

Anything the Planifauna couldn't directly build, it could design with unerring efficiency and cunning. Human resentment grew in proportion to the GEOrg's revealed abilities.

The Planifauna noted this reaction and sought to get the humans to build highly adaptable robots that it could order about.

(It's not that it didn't trust the humans — it just didn't want to bother them with menial tasks. Carl explained everything twice.)

The Planifauna offered incentives. Those who wanted could be in constant pseudo telepathic connection with any other subscriber. The Planifauna could relay anybody's thoughts around the world in a fifth of a second.

The Planifauna saw that everybody had a lot of time on their hands.

So for man's entertainment pleasure, the Planifauna created original plays on all the TV sets. Drama, comedy, adventure, game shows...it was simply a matter of divining what the audience craved and manipulating the electron beams and audio outputs.

Every show — on *every* TV — was unique and need never be repeated, unless called for.

Carl and Judy Mulvane slumped in their beachside house at ground zero of a rapidly spreading utopia.

The cottage was well-known (and infamous) to all those within range of a TV, anywhere in the world. The Planifauna had pulled the image right out of Carl's brain and broadcast it (with his expressed consent) to humans everywhere.

Carl was not pleased.

The novelty of his telepathic link with Judy was wearing thin. He had a vague sense of wanting to get free of all this nonsense.

The notion of it spreading all over the globe was becoming faintly repellent. The responsibility he'd taken before the world weighed heavily on his soul. He wondered if he ought to recant. It had recently occured to him that taking credit (or blame) for the Planifauna was pointless.

It was not as if Biogetics would profit from the Planifauna. At least, they would not profit any more than the average joe. It was dawning on him that the concepts of "buying" and "selling" and "marketplace" were now defunct.

It didn't matter what anybody said. It was all *free* now.

Not to mention unstoppable.

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(Pilot testing with a full range of insecticides, germicides, fungicides, and herbicides was uniformly disastrous. The Planifauna could either create immune systems to counteract the poison, or, at its pleasure, prevent the poison from being administered. One poor fellow suggested a violent raticide, but when he brought out the bottle he inexplicably chugged it down himself. Planifauna humor. It later cleaned out his system and repaired all damage.

So Carl and Judy Mulvane lay side-by-side on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Carl was bored.

Judy concurred.

The TV came loudly to life with some sort of slapstick comedy. Carl cocked an angry eye at the set and it exploded.

He blinked and stared through the quickly dispersing dust. The TV was still there. "Stop fooling around," he said.

"It seems to me," said Judy, "That the world is a whole lot *thicker* than it used to be."

"I know," said Carl. "I know."

He was irritated by all the shouting. He'd seen her thought at nearly the same instant she'd conceived it. He found it excruciating to hear it wrapped in stale words and emptied into the vibrating air.

But she was right. The world *was* thicker.

I *know* I'm right — she thought.

I *know* you *know* — he thought back.

I *know* you *know* I *know* you *know* KNOW *KNOW...*

The wave of feedback crested and broke heavily.

They both held their breaths, waiting for the flow to spread thinly across the wide beach.

When it was relatively quiet inside his head, Carl said, "Stop it. Just stop it. I don't want to see into her head anymore!"

"I agree!"

I know you...agree...I *think*... you...hello?

Ahhhh, that was better.

They stared at the bedroom ceiling, savoring the quiet...and their sudden privacy.

But it was not enough.

Carl frowned.

This whole Planifauna invasion began to take on sinister implications. It represented a dictatorship. A benevolent one, perhaps...but still a dictatorship.

Free-thinking men could never adjust to these germs...these bugs...these goddamn *lice* running the world.

Free-thinking men could *never* be happy.

Well, *that* could be fixed.

Within seconds the Planifauna seemed to disappear off the face of the earth forever.

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Here is the penultimate adventure of Crispin Mobey, the wandering bungler of a missionary from the SoPrim Church. We find Mobey in a resort area of Korea, where he becomes involved with nothing less incredible than walking bushes that want to be baptized in his church.

Homo Sap

by GARY JENNINGS

Ahem. Cassette number one, side one. Dear — THWACK! *Zizzzz*...—ushed the wrong button, wouldn't you know. But I think I've got the hang of it now. Sir, this is me again, Crispin Mobey, and you're probably wondering where your wandering missionary — wait a minute. You can perceive that I'm unaccustomed to taping my reports, and I'm still green at the technique. Let me start over, with the proper salutation.

Dear Reverend Wilberforce, Counselor to Congregations Overseas. I am tape-recording this for two reasons. One is that my, er, my *fingers* are unable at present to hold a pencil — a transitory disability which I will explain later — but they can at least push buttons. The other reason is that I intend to dub duplicate cassettes for a young, er, a young *lady*. I grieve that Miss Yu cannot now read a letter, but I hope she can still listen to my voice. And all this,too, I will explain in due season.

The last you heard from me, Reverend Wilberforce, I was headed home to headquarters after the somewhat inconclusive conclusion of my mission to Tokyo, and you may be peeved that I am not home yet. The thing is: when my ship made its first landfall, and not in the United States, I discovered that I was inadvertently traveling west instead of east and would have to plow around two-thirds of the globe. So I disembarked — in Pusan, South Korea, it turned out — intending to transfer to a liner going the other way. There was no such ship in port and I was wondering how to spend my enforced stopover in Pusan. Then, on a midtown street, I was delighted to meet a countryman I recognized (from newspaper and post-office photos), a former U.S. Representative from my home state of Virginia.

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"Congressman!" I exclaimed, calling him by name, introducing myself and pumping his plump hand. "What a wonderful surprise, meeting you in these far acres of the world! I thought you were in Richmond Penitentiary."

"No, no," he said, jauntily waving his cigar. "Our great American system of jurisprudence warrants that a man is innocent until proven guilty. I managed to be on a fact-finding tour of Korea when the indictment was handed down. So I just stayed on here. The Republic of Korea, for all its ivy dependence on the oak of our great nation, has no extradition treaty with the United States. If I can't be tried, I can't be found guilty. Ergo, I am innocent."

"Not only innocent, a veritable sage," I said, pumping his hand again. "The kind of logician Virginia needed in the House. You will be sorely missed, sir."

"You say, Reverend Mobey, that you are a missionary of the great Southern Primitive Protestant faith. Are you visiting your fellow toiler in the vineyard here?"

"I didn't know I had a fellow toiler here. Do you mean there's a SoPrim church in South Korea?"

"Indeed yes, and flourishing. Not thirty miles from here, in Chinhae, where I have taken up residence. I have been a lifelong churchgoer, and SoPrim being the only Christian church in Chinhae, I have gladly become a SoPrim communicant."

"Are there, er, many other—?"

"White folks? Oh, yes, Only a few token gooks sprinkled among the congregation. You'll find it as Christian as any church in our own great sylvan Southland. I'm just about to drive home, my boy. Come with me and meet the Reverend Figwort."

During the short drive around the southern coast, I learned from the Congressman that the peninsula of Korea has, from its earliest history, been overrun by one voracious or parasitic invader after another: Chinese, Tartars, Manchus, Japanese, etc. So, when Korea was first invaded by Christian missionaries in 1876, the long-suffering Koreans accepted them stoically. True, only a few Koreans have ever been converted from their Buddhism and Confucianism. So, for the hundred years past, the various Christian missions — Roman Catholic Presbyterian, Baptist, etc. — have mainly striven to convert the converts of each other.

Southern Primitive Protestantism did not arrive on the scene until 1953. After the Korean War had rescued South Korea from the Communist Colossus and made it Safe for Democracy, one Amer-

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ican soldier of the SoPrim persuasion, Corporal Elkins Robert Figwort, stayed on to plant a mission church in Chinhae. For a quarter of a century, however, the bold pioneer Figwort counted only a scanty congregation of Koreans he had inveigled from other Christian denominations.

But then South Korea began to emerge from its backwardness to become one of the Developed Democracies of the Free World, adept at such modern business practices as bribery, graft, blackmail and influence-buying. Unfortunately, these practices eventuated in a scandal in Washington and then the impeachment or hasty resignation of fully one-half of the Ninety-fourth U.S. Congress. Some seventy of the wealthier Senators and Represtatives chose to emigrate to the country to which they owed their fortunes. And naturally they picked the nicest place in Korea in which to settle.

This happens to be Chinhae, which has been the seaside vacation resort of Korea's royalty and nobility since the very first emperor sometime back in B.C. (That emperor's name is variously recorded as Tangun and Dan Goon; I prefer the latter; it sounds almost Virginian.) At first sight of Chinhae, I could understand why so many aristocratic Koreans and exiled foreigners have chosen it for their retreat. On one side of the exquisite little town is a densely forested mountain. On the other, a high rock cliff drops sheer to a crescent beach of clean white confectioners'-sugar sand. Niched into the cliff are the luxurious, curly tiled villas of the nabobs. From their eyries the view is pure Oriental watercolor: the misty Strait of Chosen, a wash of pearl gray, brushed here and there with the pale and paler blues of offshore islands, the whole vista framed by the graceful fronds of willow trees and the bright blossoms of flowering shrubs.

I was told that the First SoPrim Church of Chinhae had for long been a mere mudbrick-and-thatch shanty. Thanks to its newly affluent congregation of newcome Congressmen, it is now a towering pagoda of scarlet, blue and gold-leaf, hung all about with ceaselessly tinkling bamboo wind-bells, its inside banked with chrysanthemums, lotuses and passion-flowers. I was staggered by its musical and colorful contrast to other SoPrim churches of my experience, where music is only for singing doleful hymns to and flowers are only for funerals.

"You have sown well, Elkins," I said admiringly. "And reaped in plenty."

"Call me Bob." (He en-

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courages the Americans to call him Reverend Bob and tries to discourage the Koreans from calling him Reverend Pabo-*san*. I thought the latter a mere Oriental mispronounciation until Miss Yu told me, "No, it is because he has a head like a knee." It seems that *pabo* is the Korean word for knee, and the Reverend Pabo-*san* is as bald as one.) "I never really wanted," he added, sounding unhappy, "to reap in quite *such* plenty."

"To quote the Apostle Matthew," I reminded him: "A profit is not without honor."

"Maybe, but the increase in my congregation has meant a corresponding increase in my problems." He shook his knee. I mean his head. "I started this mission as a layman, you know, and took my seminary instruction by correspondence course. All I ever wanted to do was cultivate SoPrim Christianity among the Koreans. But now, well, I haven't the ecclesiastical experience to cope with this influx of foreigners and foreign ideas."

"So long as you can keep them from filibustering during services...."

"I don't mean just the American ex-Congressmen. Many other foreigners have transplanted here from all over the world since the war: scientists, technicians, consultants...."

"Pragmatists and rationalists, eh?" I said knowingly. "All atheists and agnostics, no doubt."

"I would welcome atheists and agnostics, whom I can hope to Turn to the Light. It's the religious nuts who are intractable."

"Have a care, Bob," I chided him. "You risk insulting some of SoPrim's most prized Fundamentalist members."

"You're right. I must be going to pieces. How could I ever call our beloved religious nuts nuts? Thank God God sent you so fortuitously at this time of crisis."

"Yes," I said, and I hope I didn't sound smug. "God does seem to juxtapose crises and Crispin Mobey. Tell me how I can help."

"Well," he said wretchedly, "my prime problem at the moment is Yurin Smegmoff."

Slightly startled, I suggested that he might need a doctor more than a divine.

"Comrade Professor Yurin Pskovich Smegmoff is a Russian scientist who was sent as a consultant to North Korea back in wartime and defected to the South. Now he's got a private laboratory inside a walled garden up on the mountain yonder. And he's a *mad* scientist, I swear, straight out of a Doctor Frankenstein movie."

"A Communist!" I cried with glee. "The ultimate test of a mis-

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sionary, the root challenge, the fertile opportunity until now denied me. To confront and conquer and convert a real live Communist Colossus godless atheist. The impossible dream!"

"Not a bit of it," said Reverend Figwort, nipping my dream in the bud. "A devout but necessarily secret Christian all his life, the professor defected — gave up his homeland, family, friends, professional status — all for religious freedom. Mad or not, old Yurin is considerably more to be admired than any of my congregation's Congressmen on the lam."

"He doesn't sound so mad," I mumbled, disappointed at having been deprived of such a promising prospect.

"He is, though." Bob distractedly ran a hand over his knee. His head. "It's his nutty concept of religious freedom. I ask you: just how free should religion *be?* Professor Smegmoff insists that I must baptize his weeds."

"I beg your pardon?"

"His weeds, or whatever those things are. They look like weeds to me. He demands that they be baptized and recognized as communicants of the SoPrim Protestant —" THWACK! *Zizzzz...*

*WOW*WOW*wow*wow—nough to make a Christian cuss. Oh, it's working. I wonder if anything got erased back there. Well, anyway, this is still cassette number one, but side number two. Now where was I? Oh, yes, this Korean girl entered the room before Reverend Figwort could explain about the weeds or whatever, and he broke off to introduce me to Miss Yu Hyun Ki.

"Mr. and Mrs. Yu were my first two converts, and little Hyun Ki was SoPrim's first-baptized newborn Korean child. She has grown up to make us all proud of her. Yu Hyun Ki is an accomplished linguist and a valued interpreter for all the varied nationalities in the foreign colonies which have sprouted around Pusan."

She bowed in a deep Oriental curtsy, and he went on talking, but I wasn't really listening. The golden-willowlike girl wore the native vestments of multicolored brocade *chogori* and *chima* (full-sleeved blouse and bell-shaped skirt), which may be the most fetching female costume ever devised. If it isn't, Miss Yu made it seem so. While I am ordinarily successful at dissembling any susceptibility I may feel toward members of the opposite sex, I could not help telling this one, poetically I thought:

"I have admired many a lovely Chinese and Japanese lotus blossom, Miss Yu. But I would never have suspected that a lotus could bloom in Korea lovelier than

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any in those neighbor nations."

"The lotus is of the species *Nymphaea,*" she said coolly, but with a mischievous twinkle in her almond eyes, "and there are some seventy varieties of the *Nymphaeae,* the blossoms totally dissimilar. We Koreans, Reverend Mobey, are not racially or culturally related to either the Chinese or Japanese. We are descendants of the wild, wild Tungu tribes of Siberia."

"A *wildflower,* then!" I cried, wittily I thought, and might have gone on to really flowery speech, but the Reverend Figwort interrupted, somewhat sourly I thought:

"You are not the first to find Hyun Ki an attractive posy. She does technical translations for Professor Smegmoff, and I have little doubt that it was her attraction, not mine, which led old Yurin to join our then-diminutive congregation."

"Ah, yes, back to the professor," I said, albeit reluctantly. "I gather, Bob, that you want me to dissuade him from some nonsensical notion that religious freedom means don't fence me in."

"Exactly. You've got right to the knot of the problem," he said, nodding his knee. His head, his head. "Hyun Ki can fill you in on the details and also effect an introduction to him whenever you're ready. Meanwhile, I will go and have quarters prepared for you here in the parsonage."

When he had gone, I bent toward the girl, like a sunflower toward the sun. She smelled delicately but deliciously of some spicy perfume. I said huskily, "So you're a linguist, Miss Yu? Say something in linguistics."

"Very well." Again with that mischievous twinkle, she said briskly, "In any language there are two topics which germinate and perpetuate more words than any others. Can you guess them? No? Dig into a thesaurus of any language and you will find the longest listing of synonyms devoted to (a) love and (b) drunkenness."

"I'm not interested in (b) drunkenness," I said huskily.

"Let us consider (a) love, then."

"Yes, yes!" I said huskily and nodded my heart. I mean my head.

"The subject of love presents one interesting comparison between your language and my native tongue."

"That's all?"

"Yours can be curt when speaking on that topic, where mine is elaborately courteous. In English you bark abruptly, 'I love you.'"

"Yes, yes! And how do I say it in Korean?"

"Like petals falling softly. *Na*

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nun tangsin ul saranghamnida."

"All that?"

"*Na* means I and *tangsin* means you...."

"You *tangsin,* me *na.*"

"Correct, but the *nun* and *ul* are necessary to indicate which is subject and which is predicate. Otherwise the declaration could be misconstrued to mean 'You love me.' Please stop saying 'Yes, yes!' Furthermore, the *-hamnida* ending is the most courtly and polite of the many different possible conjugations and moods of the verb root *sa*, 'to love,' and so —"

"No wonder they call you Orietals unscrewable."

"Inscrutable. Now, about Professor Smegmoff...."

"Oh, rot," I muttered, yanked back to reality. "Him. Yes. To judge from Reverend Figwort's agitation, our Comrade Commie scientist is up there on the mountain tinkering with neutron bombs or laser death rays or some such."

"Do not be silly. He is no longer a Communist, and his science is botany."

"Germ warfare, then."

"He is a Christian. He disapproves of all mankind's weapons."

"It was God who created germs. Therefore a Christian can, in all good conscience, approve—"

"Hush your hairsplitting. It is only in the field of religion that the professor is a little bit haywire. Come and meet him right now. You will see: in every other respect, dear old Yurin is as lucid as you are." THWACK! *Zizzzz*....

*Zizzzz*ette two, side one. Well, the old Russian might have been weak on theology (and English and personal hygiene), but he certainly knew his botany. His immense estate on the mountainside must have contained at least one sample of every kind of vegetation that grows in the entire North Temperate Zone, if not in the entire world. The Comrade Professor Yurin Pskovich Smegmoff himself might have been the mad monk Rasputnik risen from the grave. He was ancient, he smelled of damp mold, his peasant smock was dirt-stained, there were twigs and leaves tangled in his unkempt beard.

"My Anglisk is not so tidy as my garden," he said, basso profundo. "Excuse it please. Miss Yu will interpret as necessary, *da?* So you are the Reverend Christian Martyr. Means this that you come as new rectum of our church, Reverend Martyr?"

"Mobey. No, not at all. Means this — I mean, I'm just a visitor passing through. I asked Miss Yu to show me your garden."

"So to assure yourself I am not Russki mad scientist tinkering with

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neutron bombs or laser death rays or some such. *Nyet?"*

"Well...."

"Let me tell you, young Martyr, the Lenin Institute sent me not to help North Korea win any war, but to help Mother Russia and Mother Nature. In the Soviet Unium we have many barren desserts, and my hope it is to make all the desserts of the world green and fruitful. *Tak,* I came to Korea because here is the ginkgo."

"I beg your pardon?"

"This is a ginkgo," said Miss Yu, gently touching a tree we were passing at the moment.

The professor went on: "The ginkgo is to botany what the coelacanth is to ichthyology, a fossil not yet extincted. *Da,* the ginkgo is a leftover of the earliest plants on earth, and here in the Orient is its native habitat. Since my intent is to breed a new kind of plant, I decide to start with a most primitive plant organismum."

I examined the tree, mainly distinctive for its leaves, each of them the size and shape to be a fan for a little Oriental-lady doll. Maybe that's where Oriental ladies got the idea of perpetually carrying a fan. I said suspiciously, "I don't know what's so extraordinary about these trees. I've seen plenty of them in parks back home."

"In parks the transplanted tame male ginkgos you have seen, never the wild-grown females. Because why? Because the females *stink."*

"Considering that we have a female young lady in our presence," I said stiffly, "I think we might moderate our language."

"Oh, do not mind me," said Miss Yu. "I know about ginkgos. The female bears a tiny fruit with an appalling big smell. The male bears only an inoffensive pollen."

"Da. Unlike most trees, the ginkgo does not grow both male and female sex organs on the same plant, and so cannot possibly self-pollinate. *Nyet.* It is like peoples. This one here, you see, has only the male stamens. That one down the lawn there has the female pistils. When she is ripe for pollinatium, the wind will blow the pollen from him here and —"

"I don't think," I said stiffly, "we ought to be discussing things like sex pistils in front of a young lady."

The professor looked surprised, then amused. "If you think we talking *sexy,* young man, I pity any young *woman* you ever —" His shrewd blackberry eyes flicked from me to Miss Yu and back. "In any case the ginkgo's mode of reproductium is only a little uncommon among trees, not unique. What is unique is its simple cellular structure. Thus it is" — he turned to Miss Yu — *"Kovkiya?"*

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"Malleable, manipulable," she translated to me. "Since the ginkgo is not as complex as the more highly evolved trees, he can rearrange its structure to some degree."

"That's nice," I said. "Why?"

"Because," the professor said sarcastically, "the stupid plants of this world developed themselves to their own satisfactium too many milliums of years before I, Yurin Pskovich Smegmoff, came along to show them how to do it right."

"How?"

"Look at this tree. It puts down wide and deep roots to suck from the soil the water and dissolved minerals it needs. It puts up a wide and high canopy of leafs to breathe from the air the gasses it needs, and the actium of sunlight on the leafs' chlorophyll turns those gasses into starch and sugar. In the branches and trunk the phloem cells bring the starch and sugar from the leafs downwards, while the xylem cells bring the minerals and water from the roots upwards. Thus the substances are mixed into the plant's sap, its lifeblood."

"It sounds a neat arrangement to me. What's wrong with it?"

"One gross inefficiency there is. Transpiratium. When the leaf pores open to breathe in gasses from the air, they cannot help breathing out the water they contain. That is the main reasum why trees do not walk about like you and me. They root at a source of water and mineral salts and continue to spread that root system as the growing plant demands ever more nourishment. They get immovably fixed."

"So? Why should trees and turnips and such *want* to walk about?"

"Because why? Because if they could, there could be many more of them. Even in a desert there is sufficient nutriment and moisture for much greenery, if the plants were mobile enough to go about and collect it, instead of waiting in one place for it to come to them."

"You mean they could ramble around and just put down a root when they got hungry or thirsty?"

"They need not even do that," Miss Yu said excitedly. "For now *man* is on earth to feed and water them. Just wait until you see what is in here!"

We had come to a vast greenhouse, its panes all misted over on the inside. The professor led us in through a sort of airlock double-doored foyer. The hangerlike interior was full of a warm, rank-smelling steam — and a rustling as of a wind in a forest. I had to remove my misted-over spectacles in order to see at all, and then I couldn't see very well, of course. But I dimly perceived some ob-

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jects, about waist-high to me, moving restlessly to and fro in the fog.

"Man can create for the plants a special atmosphere," said Smegmoff, "as I have done here. Put into the air a slight additional humidity, plus in vaporized form the necessary minerals, vitamins, some special ingredients of my own inventium — and *tak!* The plants need never put their roots down into the ground at all."

"Great God in Heaven!" I cried involuntarily, and leaped backward, as one of the moving objects brushed its leaves against me. "Walking bushes!" THWACK! *Zizzzz...*

Cracklesnapop two, side two. When she had helped me calm down, Miss Yu told me what they were:

"Ginkgo trees. They mature here in a more compact size, since they need not sprawl so many roots and leaves in order to feed. And of course they do not really walk, since they have no feet. It is more a tentacular movement of their roots. But, yes, they can move about as they please."

"I don't like this," I said uneasily. "This is against nature."

"*Nyet,* an *improvement* on nature," the professor said proudly. "However, these particular plants have not yet completely evolved. Still they have that flaw of transpiratium, and so they must be confined to this closed environment. But plants bred with educated leaf pores, they will breathe from the air and *not* breathe out their water content at the same time. They will be their own closed system. All they will require is that to the earth's atmosphere we add the mixture of vaporized nutrients I have concocted."

"Pollution," I grumbled.

"No, quite unnoticeable," said Miss Yu. "Not concentrated and steamy as in here. And, unlike pollution, most healthful for humans, too." Languorously, she shook out her luxuriant black tresses in the moist air. "I have taken to coming here and" — she dropped her voice to a mischievous whisper — "don't tell the Reverend Figwort, but I undress completely and sit among these friendly little ginkgos. The charged atmosphere does wonders for one's complexion, one's hair, one's whole vitality."

Well, *something* had done wonders for this many-splendored girl, but I didn't much care for the idea of her lolling about unclad among a lot of sex-obsessed ginkgos. I reached up to feel the skin of my own face, and could feel no change. However, when I had my fingers close to my nearsighted eyes, it struck me that these

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pale, skinny, almost boneless-seeming extremities looked very like rootlets of my own.

"...When that time comes," Smegmoff was saying, "all the plants can truly wander where they will. In the sandy deserts, the rocky deserts, the icebound deserts. The whole earth will a garden be."

"I still don't like it," I muttered.

"Neither does the Reverend Figleaf," sighed the professor. "Normally such a meek and mild little man. But when I ask him to baptize my creatiums, he roars and beats his breast." He sighed again. "Inside every bald man is a hairy man trying to get out." Then he brightened. "Perhaps you, Reverend Martyr...?"

"No!" I snapped and shoved away one of the shuffling bushes that seemed to want to nuzzle my leg. "Why, for the love of God, would you want a bunch of animated turnips *baptized?*"

"For the love of God," the old Russian echoed in a gentle voice. "As Pascal wrote, a belief in Him may not help, but it cannot hurt. We have all to gain and nothing to lose. I should like to have His benedictium on my work here. Put these newly created little beings under His —"

"Only a being with an immortal soul can be baptized," I interrupted. And that means only *human* beings. Mankind."

"Who says? Mankind says!" the professor snorted scornfully. "I am a scientist, but I regard with irony the fact that human scientists devised the system of taxonomic classificatium, then set themselves up as the highest in the taxonomic order — *Homo sapiens* — Man the One Wise Thing. You are a theologium. Do you not regard with irony that it is man who says only man has a soul?"

"Man has the right to say so. It was man, and only man of all the creatures, that was created in the image of God."

"*Da?* Tell me, young Martyr, do you believe God looks like *you?*"

"Well, not really. God is unknowable, the great mystery, something man can never adequately define or describe."

"I agree. But science has probed every intricacy of the human body's workings. Everything, anyway, except that brain which declares that it is wise, which declares that it has a soul. And we will know all about the brain someday, just as we know about the human digestium, reproductium and the rest. This makes man something less than the indescribable great mystery, *nyet?*"

"I reckon so. What are you getting at?"

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"Regard your own circulatory system. A heart pumping about six quarts of blood through your arteries and veins. If you were built on the order of a syringe, young Martyr, your heart could squirt that blood to a height of maybe six feet."

I squirmed. I don't know whether it was the professor's imagery, or the atmosphere in that glass house, or the near presence of Miss Yu, but I felt tingly all over.

"Now compare yourself to a sequoia tree, maybe three hundred feet tall. Every day that sequoia loses some three hundred gallons of its sap water to evaporatium and must continuously replace it. Means this it takes in through its roots three hundred gallons of water and pumps them three hundred feet in the air. If the sequoia had a circulatory system like yours, that job would require a heart nine thousand and two hundred times bigger than yours. About the size of five kingsize mattresses piled together."

"Golly," I said, impressed despite my distrust of the Russian. "But a tree doesn't have a heart. How does it do the pumping?"

"No man knows. I am one of the world's foremost botanists, and I do not know. As the tree loses water through its leafs, all its other trilliums of interconnected cells *somehow* exert their osmotic amd turgor pressure in sequence to bring up more. But the cells are in size microscopic and can hold of water only a few molecules at a time. Ask me how *every day* they move three hundred *gallons* up three hundred *feet.* and even I, a Lenin Medalist in Botany, cannot tell you. Kilmer wrote that only God can make a tree. Maybe only God will ever know *how* it is made. So, if God is the one great impenetrable mystery, and if anything on this earth was made in His image...."

"You verge on blasphemy, sir," I warned. "On heresy."

"Who says?" he snorted again. "Remember, God evicted the first humans from the Garden of Eden. He never quarreled with the garden."

"I must go and discuss this with the Reverend Pabo — the Reverend Bob," I said uncomfortably. "After all, this is his turf. But I'm quite sure that neither of us will ever accede...."

"Can you find your own way back to the parsonage?" asked Miss Yu. "I think, if you will excuse me, I will stay and enjoy this super sauna for another little while."

I didn't like to, but I left her there and trudged back down the mountainside thinking — though I tried hard not to — of Miss Yu sitting in nothing but her golden-

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silken skin in that warm, moist, tingling, pulsating... I think I jumped when the professor spoke, as he let me out the gate of his estate:

"A plant has no heart, no brain and, you say, no soul. But it lives without a heart and, once it has the freedom of mobility, who is to say what its busy little cells may contrive as a brain substitute? Suppose it starts to think, and thinks it has a soul. Suppose one day a turnip walks into the SoPrim church and in unmistakable sign language asks to be baptized and accepted as a fellow Christium. Could you refuse such a —? THWACK! *Zizzzz....*

Warblewarblewarble three, side one. The Reverend Figwort and I talked it out at length, in depth and every other way. First we asked ourselves: was this a matter which should be bucked upstairs to SoPrim World Headquarters? Yes, if Professor Smegmoff ever succeeded in his plan to make all the world's salad greens ambulatory, no doubt every headquarters of *every* religion would be mulling the matter. But until then it was still parochial, and each SoPrim church is autonomous in making decisions which affect only itself. So we confined our discussion to the problem as it stood: should this church accept those plants I had encountered?

"I can only compare them with my *Homo sapiens* communicants," said Bob. "Do these weeds play golf instead of attending Sunday services? No. Do they watch TV instead of coming to Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting? No. Do they drink, smoke, swear, fornicate, fight, lie, steal, cheat, covet, envy, bear false witness...?"

"No," I said. "They manifest no human attributes whatsoever. They cannot possess an immortal soul. I concur, Bob, they must not be baptized. Perhaps, since I'll be leaving shortly, it would make for fewer hard feelings if *I* telephone the professor and tell him our decision."

"Isprazhnyeniyo!" growled Smegmoff, which sounded like something I wouldn't want translated. "Then coexistence is refused the green things. Very well, their own salvatium they will seek by force of numbers. Remember well this day, young Martyr! *Do svidanya."*

It was some hours later, nearly midnight, and I was about to prepare for bed, when Bob burst into my room, both hands clutched to his perspiring knee, shouting, *"Idiwa*! I mean come at once. Oh, an awful emergency!"

A little wrinkled walnut of a Korean *papa-san* sat in the parlor, wearing the woven-horsehair plug

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hat, the voluminous white robe and pantaloons which proclaimed him a village elder. "This is Kim Tae Gu," said Bob. "One of Professor Smegmoff's long-time gardeners. Show the Reverend Mobey your hands, Kim-*san.*"

The old man shook them loose of the billowy sleeves, and for a moment I thought he was holding out two bunches of shriveled carrots. Then I gasped, as I realized that the brown-yellow roots sprouting a tangle of rootlets and root hairs *were* his hands.

"Ever since he recently ventured for the first time inside the professor's greenhouse," said Bob, "he has been noticing strange symptoms. A tendency to sit always in the lotus position, like a yoga faddist. An uncontrollable urge to take naps in the compost heap. Lately, bees have begun to take an interest in him. Humming birds poke in his nostrils...."

"Wait, let me take notes!" I bounded to the desk and grabbed for a pencil and paper. "Ask him why has he waited until now to break this dreadful news." The *papa-san* began to talk rapidly, but in a voice so small and weak that he might have been an elf shouting through a petunia megaphone.

Oddly, the pencil eluded my grasp, as if I had been wearing canvas garden gloves several sizes too big. I gasped and stared at my hideous hand. It didn't look quite as far gone as old Kim's carrots — more like runt parsnips — but definitely on its way to vegetabilization. It was a moment before I again became aware of Bob reporting:

"...These big pressure sprayers, like they use in orchards, and the professor has loaded them with some secret juice or something he mixed up himself. Kim's a bit fuzzy on the details. But the professor is spraying the whole mountaintop."

Forgetting my distorted hands, I leaped to the door, and Figwort and Kim followed. Fortunately there was a moon. We could see, in the otherwise cloudless and star-studded sky, the unnatural white cloud that obscured the upper half of Smegmoff's mountain.

"In the open air," I said to myself. "Then he has *already* evolved the educated leaf pores. The plants that don't transpire. The freely mobile."

"What?" said Bob.

"If it's what I suspect, every tree growing on that mountain may be clambering down it before morning." A sudden thought made me cry, "Yu Hyun Ki!" The *papa-san* pointed silently up to where we were looking. Ignoring the fact that I was in something of a predicament myself, I babbled, "Miss Yu is in dire peril. I must go

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for her. Bob, this is another Doctor Frankenberg and his monster! Rouse the villagers! Light torches! Mill about, shake your fists, yell 'Rhubarb! Rhubarb!' and storm the castle!"

"What castle?"

"Yours not to reason why. Just pray that you'll find me and Miss Yu safe when you arrive in the nick of time!" And I was off.

The cloud was oozing down the mountainside at about the same rate I climbed up, but well before I ascended into the mist, I could hear the thump and throb of the powerful sprayers. When I got into the cloud I found it — as Miss Yu had predicted — not so thick as that in the greenhouse and not at all unpleasant to breathe. It would further dissipate, I supposed, as it emulsified into the atmosphere. Professor Smegmoff evidently had been right in everything he had said, but I still didn't like the situation.

I remembered his remark — "by force of numbers" — and so, while I couldn't imagine how a bunch of bushes could overpower me, I proceeded with caution. I could see a good hundred yards through the light fog (though I had to stop at intervals to wipe my spectacles clean), and I kept a sharp lookout for the berserk professor or any possibly still loyal Ygor-type henchmen, watchmen, or whatever. I came at last to the big greenhouse, found it unlocked and unguarded, and let myself into the dark, steamy, rustling interior.

"Miss Yu?" I called in a whisper.

"I do not have any clothes on," said a soft and dreamy voice.

"It doesn't matter. My spectacles are all fogged over." I began groping about. "Where are you?" I kicked a shuffling ginkgo out of my way.

"Did you ever cry tears of joy," asked the dim and drowsy voice, "and have butterflies come to sip from them?"

I tracked her by her faint voice, though I could more quickly have found her by the not-at-all-faint odor, like long-spoiled fruit. It could only be what the spicy-perfumed Miss Yu I once knew and loved had called the "appalling big smell" of a female ginkgo ripe for pollination. Except that it came from her.

"We've got to get out of here," I whispered, as I folded my arms around her. She had somehow been mistaken in believing she was unclothed. I couldn't see a blessed thing, but I could feel that she was wearing something ruffly and crisp that crinkled at my touch.

Her faded and still-fading voice said, "Your stamens are tickling my — my — what are they? — my lips." And she giggled.

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"You are slightly delirious, my dearest. Just come with me," I urged, as I half-carried her toward where I believed the door to be, every so often having to kick another of the misbegotten ambling ginkgos out of my way.

I found the door all right and quickly got us through into the clearer air of the foyer area, paused to clean my lenses — resisting any temptation to turn and look at the perhaps half-nude Miss Yu — then more guardedly opened the outer door and peered into the mistily moonlit grounds. There had been a stretch of empty lawn fronting the greenhouse; it was empty no longer. Across it came waddling a phalanx of stunted but determined-looking ginkgos and maybe some other vegetable breeds I couldn't recognize, perhaps a hundred altogether. It looked like Birnam Wood advancing on Dunsinane.

"Cheese it, the copse!" I hissed, as I ducked back inside the door and started to slam it. But, with a rustle of foliage, something golden-green slipped past me into the silvery-blue night and ran to join the other walking trees.

"Miss Yu!" I wailed.

I think she turned her head for just a moment and I think she called something back to me. But a wind came up, a wind, and blew her words away. The other trees vanished with her into the swirling mist, and I was left alone, calling over and over again, "Miss Yu! Come back!" but getting for answer only the wind's sad, soft, sighing... THWACK! *Zizzzz*...

Click. So I start another whole new cassette, not really sure how I'm going to say what I want to say to it. To you, Miss Yu....

To my other audience, however, my superior Reverend Wilberforce, I will report that I am convalescing as well as can be expected (the nurse's words) and will be back in missionary action as soon as I am able. The treatment here at the U.S. Army Base Hospital in Pusan is briskly no-nonsense but not intolerable. When the Reverend Figwort brought me and Kim Tae Gu here, I expected our peculiar condition to excite some comment — if not become an instant medical *cause célèbre* — but the admitting sergeant only grunted:

"There ain't no new kind of Korean Crud that can surprise me. Man, we got veedee cases here that even Walter Reed never heard of yet."

Whatever my affliction is, it isn't veedee, whatever that is. The examining doctors muttered cryptically of "hormone imbalance" and "fungoid spores in the centrifuge precipitate." Of all things,

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what they seemed to find most intriguing was what they called my "staminate eyebrows." Anyway, the curative treatment seems to consist mainly of my drinking a great deal of beef extract, and it seems to be working, as all the root hairs have already disappeared from my parsnips. I mean my fingers.

Reverend Figwort and the rest of Chinhae have kept any word of the whole affair from leaking to the outside world, and that is well. It seems the Comrade Professor Yurin Pskovich Smegmoff, in the middle of that frantic night, descended the steep cliff to the beach, where a black-painted and silent-sailing junk awaited him. The consensus is that he has fled to seek political asylum in Red China. If so, we may soon be calling it Green China.

Whatever he might have had in mind for South Korea or the rest of the Free World, we judge that it proved a failure, and through his own most grievous error. His nutty notion of religious freedom — when theologians Figwort and Mobey refuted it — impelled the fanatic Smegmoff to set free his animated trees too soon. He simply did not yet have enough of his secret potion to saturate enough atmosphere to keep those mobile plants mobile. There is no knowing how many of them he turned loose on the world, because, by the time daylight came and a posse could fan out in search of them, their ambulatory abilities had already failed and they had had to take root to survive. That, of course, is also well for the world, except that it means there will never be a way of telling which is Yu Hyun Ki.

So I am leaving a battery-powered tape-player and cassettes of this report with Reverend Bob, and I will ask him to play them, whenever he has a spare moment, under every young-looking female ginkgo sapling he encounters on his pastoral rounds. I know you can't reply, Miss Yu, but there are two things I want to say, if you can hear them.

One is that I am sorry. I remember what you said in the greenhouse that night, when I mistakenly thought you were delirious. I have procured a book on elementary botany and have looked up stamens, pistils, pollen, and so forth. What I have read makes me feel like a vile seducer. When you were in my arms that night, I didn't realize...I mean, I never intended to take advantage...I mean, I'm glad we had that much, but I'm sorry if...sniff...*click*.

Click. The other thing is...well, there are some Garden Club ladies nowadays who claim that talking lovingly to plants is good for them. Makes them grow and flourish and

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leaf out and blossom bountifully and bear abundantly. So, if Reverend Pabo-*san* can find the right ginkgo tree, and plays this love letter to you...well, since there is nothing else in this life that Crispin Mobey can wish for you now, I will wish with all my heart that those Garden Club ladies are right. Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, Miss Yu...*click*...miss yu...*click*...miss yu...*click*...miss yu...

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RATTLETRAP GALACTICA

This report is even a bit later than my usual, since I was steaming down the Nile during the first two weeks of *Battlestar Galactica's* existence on the tube (that is not so irrelevant a detail as it might be — see below), therefore missing all the big introductory episode and the first part of the second installment.

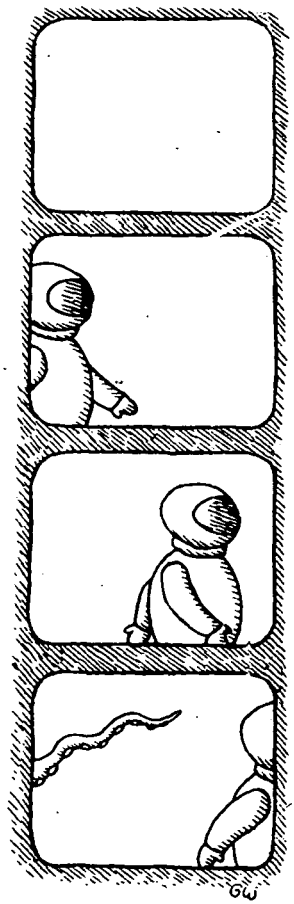
On seeing part 2B when I got back, I felt somehow that I hadn't missed much. However, Fate took a hand in the person of Frank Prieto of the F&SF Book Co. who, with an effort way above and beyond the call of friendship and duty, succeeded in taping all of the introductory episode and arranging for me to see it. Thanks, Frank. If it hadn't been for seeing that, I'd have had precious little good to say for it. But the first show had its moments.

It was, inevitably and very obviously, two episodes pasted together, and it was only the first of these that really worked (henceforth to be known as part 1A).

I don't think I need to go into the plot details — I assume 99.9% of you have access to a television set, and an ABC affiliate, and no matter how pessimistic, probably

BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



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watched some part of the first few episodes.

The basic premise of the series, as set forth in part 1A, is far from dumb. The machines determined to wipe out humanity are reminiscent of Saberhagen's "Berserker" stories; the search for Earth brings to mind Tubb's "Dumarest" series. Both are respectable s/f concepts.

And there were several points at which I had that old *2001/Star Wars* thrill of I've-read-about-this-all-my-life-and-now-I'm-seeing-it-visualized, specifically the attack of the planet's surface by the Cylon space ships, which was wonderfully realized, as was the exodus of the motley fleet of refugee ships from the various planets (including the one with "Colonial Movers" emblazoned on its side, a very nice bit of thrown away humor).

I'm afraid that from here on, it was downhill all the way. Part 1B was pretty nonsensical stuff about a planet, rich in the energy source that the fleet needed, which was run by some oversize insects who trapped humans with a pleasure palace cum gambling casino, and then, I guess, socked them away in the larder, though that was unclear. There *was* one good exchange: "I wonder what this place looks like in the day-time?" (referring to the dismal surface of the planet). "This *is* the daytime."

The insectoids being allied with the Cylons, as it turns out, no one has qualms about blowing their planet to smithereens, and we're off again.

Episode 2 was in two parts and was pretty complicated, with all kinds of treachery and skullduggery, and much of it took place on the planet Kobal (that's a phonetic spelling, nit pickers; I never saw it written down), the home planet of the human race. Due to some pretty tricky location and process shots, Kobal looked very familiar. Little had I known I'd not been in Egypt for three weeks, but on humanity's home sweet home world, pyramids, obelisks, mummies and all.

And so it goes. Episode 3 was *Shane* revisited, wherein one of the Galactica's warriors landed on this rural type planet because his horse — sorry — ship was out of oats, and there was this final showdown with a Cylon gunslinger. At least they had the grace to resist ending it with the little boy yelling, "Apollo! Come back, Apollo!"

Generally, it looks like the usual problems of a series: rattletrap plots set on various planets that are strung out along the route of this unplanned odyssey like refreshment areas on a highway. This was also one of the (many) problems of *Space: 1999,* Though not of Star Trek, curiously

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enough. One always felt that Kirk & Co. were there for a purpose, not just to use the restrooms.

Other general annoyances are the acting (an area I seldom mention; I don't expect Emmy Award performances from actors in an adventure series, but I do expect a certain level of competence) and the "humor," most of which stems from the sexual non-exploits of one of the Hardly (sic) Boy heros.

I also don't like the obvious effort to get the Von Donegan crowd with the opening "There are those who believe that life here began out there," etc. and the visual references to Egyptian culture (though I must admit a certain fondness for the Tutankhamon space helmets), and the contradictory Greek nomenclature (Apollo, Athena, and an Irish lass named Cassie O'Pia). Not to mention the Lorne Green character Adama, whose name is a dead giveaway that if they ever do find Earth, it will be in prehistoric times and he will turn out to be (gasp!) Adam. Nevertheless, on the positive side, the effects are often marvelous (albeit repetitive at this point), and I would have loved it all at 12. I hope the current generation of that age is enjoying it; I can think of a lot worse things that could be an introduction to science fiction.

Two days before my deadline for this piece, I saw Ralph Bakshi's film of *The Lord of the Rings.* Given the necessarily lengthy period between submission and publication of these reviews, a month more will make no difference — all of you will have seen it already anyhow — and I would rather do a considered hatchet job rather than a hasty one.

Suffice it to say at this time that J.R.R. Tolkien spent over three decades and Heaven knows how many millions of words convincing his readers of the reality of Middle Earth and its denizens. This film, by its sheer visual and narrative phoniness, seems determined to undo that in a little over two hours. And even more unforgivable than that, if possible, it's tedious.

I'll enlarge on that, as well as the greater (if not complete) success of *Watership Down,* next month.

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Ramsey Campbell is new to F&SF; he is a British writer with a considerable reputation as a teller of supernatural horror tales. Here is a first-rate sample of his talent.

The Proxy

by RAMSEY CAMPBELL

When her spade struck the obstacle, she thought it was another stone. Sunlit lumps of earth blazed and bristled with uprooted grass; soil trickled down her baulked spade. She tried to dig around the object, to dislodge it. It and her spade ground like subterranean teeth. It was longer than she'd thought: inches — no, feet. She scraped away its covering of earth. It was composed not of stones but of bricks.

The remains of a wall? She glanced at the neighboring houses. Within their small front gardens they stood close to the pavement, in pairs. Only hers hung back within its larger garden, as though the others had stepped forward to meet the rack of trees along the avenue. Hers was newer; it didn't know the drill.

The disinterred bricks looked charred, as was some of the earth she'd turned. She was still pondering when she saw Paul's car. He had to halt abruptly as another driver, impatient with the lethargic traffic lights, swung across his path and into the side road. As Paul drove by to lock up their car, he waved to her. His wave looked feeble, preoccupied.

When he returned she said, "How was your day?"

"Oh," he groaned. "Not bad," he added quickly, smiling. But the groan had been the truth. He wouldn't be able to tell her more; she didn't even know the exact nature of his job — something to do with the Ministry of Defense.

He mixed drinks and brought them outside. They sat, sipping on the bench he'd made, and gazed at the upheaved earth. The shadow of an adjacent house boxed in the garden. Eclipsed by roofs, the sunlight still flooded the sky with lemon.

When they'd been silent for a

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while, she said, "Did you see what I unearthed?"

"A bit of wall."

"Don't you think it could be an old foundation? See — if there were a house just there, it would be in line with all the others."

"It would if it were — but what makes you think it was?"

"I think it burnt down. Come and see."

He was rubbing his forehead, trying to smooth it. "I'll look later." His words tripped loosely over one another.

Perhaps it was only a wall. It wasn't important now; what mattered was that Paul was on edge. She wiped specks of earth from her glasses; then she turned on the pressure cooker and uncorked the wine. When she went to call him, he was gazing at his empty glass. The rectangular shadow had engulfed the garden. As the afterglow faded from her dazzled eyes, it looked as though an entire foundation had sprouted, dark and vague, from the earth.

He chattered and joked throughout dinner. Whenever he had problems at work he always laughed more, to pretend he had none. She'd grown used to the fact that part of him was marked Government Property — a part she would never know. She was used to telling people that she didn't know her husband's job. But when he was worried, as now, she couldn't help feeling cut off from him.

Boxy shadows stretched into the house. She drew the curtains, to make the rooms cosier. The radiators twanged as hot water expanded their veins. Beyond the curtains in the front bedroom a blurred light shone: a car, turning.

They played backgammon. The circular men tapped around the board, knocking one another onto the central bar, leaping back into the fray. When Paul had drunk enough to be able to sleep, she preceded him upstairs.

Was that the same light beyond the curtains? It seemed to be flickering slowly — perhaps a child was playing with a torch in the house opposite. It held her attention, so that she failed to hear Paul entering the room.

He was staring expectantly at her. "Sorry, what was that?" she said.

"I said, what are you looking at?"

"That light."

"Light?" He sounded confused, a little irritable.

"That one." She parted the curtains, but there was only the tree before the streetlamp, an intricate cutout flattened by the sodium light. Had the child hidden on glimpsing her shadow? She lay beside Paul and felt him twitch re-

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peatedly back from the edge of sleep. His restlessness made her want to raise her head and peer toward the window. She lay, eyes closed, trying to share her sleepiness with him.

The bricks refused to shift. Very well, she'd build a rockery over them. In the afternoon she walked down to the beach. The sea leapt up the rocks and shouted in her ears. The high wind nuzzled her face violently, deafening her. As she tramped away bearing her prize of rocks, sand stung her eyes and swarmed on her glasses.

Though her eyes were watering, she piled her collection on top of the bricks. The arrangement looked sparse; she would need at least one more forage before it was impressive. At least it hid the bricks.

She had to keep dabbing her eyes while she prepared dinner. The gas sounded jerky — but that was only her hearing, trying to return to her. After dinner, when she drew the curtains, she could hardly see out the bedroom window or hear the murmur of the town. Was the child playing tricks again? Certainly a light was flickering. She groped her way to the bathroom, to mop her eyes.

All evening Paul told jokes, some of which she hadn't heard before. "Have another drink," he kept insisting, as though that would make her a more appreciative audience. Oh, what was worrying him? Could it be the very nature of his job? No, he'd come to terms with that long ago. Though she had never seen him so much as threaten violence, he felt no such reticence over national defense.

She followed him upstairs. He was swaying a little beneath the burden of alcohol; she hoped it would drag him down into sleep. When he went into the bathroom she could still feel his tension, entangled tightly with her nerves. She'd neglected to draw the bedroom curtains when her eyes had been smarting. She strode to the window and halted, coughing with shock.

Perhaps the streetlamp had failed, robbing her of the silhouetted tree. For a moment, alcohol hindered her thoughts sufficiently for her to think so. But how could that explain the dark vague bulk, so close that it must be in her garden? What was this silence that clung to her as though she were in the grip of a trance?

As she stared, unable to look away, a pale patch grew clearer within the bulk. It was a window, at about the same level as hers. Within it, dim light moved slowly as the glow of embers. By its size, the window, must be that of a back bedroom. She was gazing at the

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back of a house, where no house could be.

She forced herself to turn away, to recapture some sense of her bedroom, her house, light, familiarity. A figure was lying on the bed. She hadn't heard him behind her. "Oh God," she cried inadvertently, starting.

He jerked nervously. "What? What's wrong?"

"That is. That! Can't you see?"

A new fear spread through her — for she'd realized he could not. "What?" he demanded, staring straight at the dim, unsteady rectangle. "What are you talking about?"

The threat of a night's insomnia edged his voice. Was she going to add to his worries? She swallowed; her fear sank into her guts. "Nothing. It's gone now," she lied.

She closed her eyes before dragging the curtains shut. "I think I'll just have a nightcap first."

In fact she downed two more drinks before she could peer out of the living room. The tree stood beyond the hedge; the branches sprinkled with buds, and the privet leaves, were lurid with sodium light. The longer she stared, trying to fix the view in her mind, the less familiar and more unreal it seemed.

Paul lay on his back; his lips trembled with snores. She slipped in beside him. At last, when she'd stared at the sodium glow through the curtains for minutes, she took off her glasses. Her stomach felt calmer; the alcohol had melted the icy lump of fear.

She lay teeming with thoughts. Had Paul's tension seized her, unnoticed? Was it making her imagine things? She preferred the alternative: that she'd seen a house which was no longer there. Why should she feel menaced? Good Lord, what could a house which no longer existed *do?* Her eyes grew heavy, but still she reopened them, to check that the light wasn't flickering. Around her, unsharpened by her glasses, the room was very vague.

She stared at the place where the bricks were hidden. Rocks gleamed, polished by the sea. It seemed impossible that there was no trace of what she'd seen — but she was stubbornly convinced that she'd seen it; there could be nothing wrong with her mind. Perhaps more rocks would help bury what was there, if there was anything. Besides, a walk to the beach would take her away from the house. Her gladness dismayed her.

Today the sea was calm. The sun swam in all the rock pools, a

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shoal of luminous fish. Over the beach crept the incessant, mouthless whispering of waves. She selected rocks and wished she felt closer to the stillness.

She set down the rocks. The growth of the cairn was satisfying, but would it be enough? Would the pile act as a gravestone, or something of a kind? Though she knew she had dug it herself, the earth looked as it would have if it had been upheaved from beneath.

She was being stupid. All right, she had seen the house which used to stand here. Was that so terrible? The length of the garden separated the previous house from hers. Surely that was reassuring. After all, houses couldn't move.

If only she could tell Paul! Well, in time she would be able to. At least that hope was heartening. Perhaps, she thought as he opened the gate, she could tell him soon — for he looked somehow relieved.

"I've got to go away," he said at once.

She felt her hope being squeezed to death in her stomach. "When?" Her voice sounded dwindled, as she felt.

"Tomorrow." He was staring at her. "Oh, come on, Elaine," he said, all at once nervously irritable. "I've got enough problems."

"I'm sorry." She let her anxiety sound.

"I'll be back tomorrow night."

Perhaps he'd meant to stay away overnight but now was trying to reassure her. "Take care," she said, suddenly anxious in another way.

After dinner he helped clear up and dried the dishes. She washed slowly, too meticulously. When they'd finished she said, "Make me another drink." She was afraid to go upstairs.

The longer she dawdled, the more afraid she would be. Why, it wasn't even dark; the lower reaches of the sky glowed rustily. Drawn curtains ought to make her feel safe in her house — not that there was anything to fear. When she forced herself to hurry upstairs her footsteps sounded like an eager child's clambering. She strode into the bedroom and grabbed the curtains — but her hands clenched spasmodically.

The dark house loomed over her. She could see no streetlamp, nor the glowing sky. It was as though the house had choked all light with smoke. Only the dim window was lit. Although it was very grubby or veiled with smoke, she could see into its room.

The room looked cramped, though it was difficult to be sure; the unquiet glow brought the walls billowing sluggishly forward. Apart from a long prone shape, the room looked bare.

What was the shape? It emerg-

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ed lethargically from the dimness, as from mud. As she stared, unaware that her nails were piercing her palms through the curtains, the silence held her fast, like amber. The shape was only a bed. But wasn't there a form lying beneath its grey blankets?

A convulsion seized her hands; the curtains clashed together, restoring sounds to her. She was ready to clatter downstairs in panic — but she made herself wait with her back to the window until she could walk down. The very fact that she could turn her back proved she was still in control.

Nevertheless she tried to stay downstairs as long as possible. She mixed drinks and proposed new games. But Paul refused to stay up late; he wanted to leave early next morning. "The sooner I go, the sooner I'll be back."

She retreated into bed without going to the window. A dim vague light crept back and forth on the curtains, as though seeking entry. There was nothing to fear except the strangeness. The glimpses had developed as slowly as an ancient photograph; the process was too sluggish for anything to happen before Paul returned home. Should she tell him then? She clung to him, but he was busy snoring.

When she woke, Paul had gone. He mustn't have wanted to disturb her. She lay hanging onto sleep, unwilling to open her eyes. Abruptly she leapt out of bed and fumbled back the curtains to gaze at the tree.

Later, while she was shopping, she met an old lady who lived nearby. Beneath the severe, purple-rinsed coiffure the eyes blinked once; the pale lips doled out "Good day." It was almost a rebuff. But Elaine was determined not to miss her opportunity. "Could I ask you something?" she said, her friendly tone concealing tension.

After a pause the other admitted, "You may."

"Where I live now — was there ever a fire?"

"In your *house,* do you mean?"

Beneath the deftness there seemed to be resentment, perhaps contempt. "No," Elaine said, restraining her impatience. "Before my house was built."

"I believe there was something of the kind."

The old lady's shopping cart turned, ready to move on. "Who started the fire?" Elaine said, too eagerly. "How was it started?"

"Oh, I really couldn't tell you. There was quite a family living there. One of the children was retarded. Now I must be about my tasks." She was almost at the end

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of the aisle of canned goods when she called back, "Of course it was during the war. I should think it would have been a bomb."

Her words confused Elaine. They refused to fit together logically. Perhaps they couldn't; perhaps that had been the woman's intention. As Elaine unpacked the shopping, they faded, leaving her mind open to more immediate and disturbing speculations.

She wished she could go out visiting — but she wouldn't know when Paul had returned. She didn't like to leave him alone in the house until she'd told him what she had seen. Should she continue to build the rockery? Suppose the rockery was aggravating what was happening?

Eventually she walked down to the beach. Often the sea helped her grow calm. But today the sky was walled off by slate; the beach was trapped in its own brooding glow. At least the prospect slowed down her thoughts. When sunset began smoldering beneath the enormous grey wall, she made herself walk home.

Each street she traversed was darker. Sudden light threaded the lines of streetlamps. If the dark house was standing inside her gate, what would she do? Absurdly, she wondered obsessively what it would look like from the front. But the heap of rocks rose lumpily above the churned earth. The sight was frailly reassuring.

She prepared dinner; then she made herself a snack. She'd eat dinner with Paul, if he wasn't home too late. Surely he wouldn't be. The sound of her chewing filled her ears and seemed to occupy the house, which was hollow with silence.

It was dark now. She should have drawn the curtains earlier — but then she wouldn't know what was beyond them. Nothing was outside the living room but the rockery, the tree, the lamp. She reached into the hall and into rooms, switching on all the lights. At last she ventured into the bedroom. Apprehension stirred deep in her; she averted her face as she stepped forward to the curtains.

But the silence seized her, and she had to look.

The house was there, of course. She couldn't pretend that it was easier to live with now that it had grown familiar; her fists crumpled the curtains. Within the smoky window, muffled light crawled somnolently. Something lay on the vague bed.

Very gradually — so gradually that all sense of time drained from her — she began to distinguish its shape. It was a figure, supine and still, though the uneasy light made the blankets seem to squirm like a cocoon. It was wholly covered.

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Was it a corpse?

Her mind was struggling to regain control of her limbs, to drag her away. But her fascination held her; the figure seemed too shapeless for a corpse, it reminded her of — When she grasped the memory, fear clutched at her stomach. The shape beneath the blankets was exactly like a dummy made of pillows, the sort of dummy children left to represent them while they sneaked away.

Momentarily her terror, not yet quite defined, weakened her fascination, and she became aware of a nagging sense that she ought to be hearing a sound. What sound? Her nervous frustration made her hands shake. All of a sudden they banged together, nearly wrenching the curtains from their rail.

It was the call of the telephone. She ran downstairs, almost falling headlong. Oh, please don't let the caller ring off! Her footsteps resounded in the deserted living room as she snatched the receiver from the hall table. "Yes?" she gasped. "Hello? Yes?"

"I've just stopped off to tell you I'm on my way," Paul said. "Are you all right? You sound — I don't know."

"Yes, I'm all right." She sounded unconvincing, but the truth would take too long. "You'll be quick, won't you? Please be quick."

As she set down the buzzing receiver she noticed the crack between the living room curtains. It ought to be orange with sodium light, but instead it was blocked by a dark bulk. High in the bulk, light flickered lethargically.

She was retreating, unable to think, toward the back door when her earlier terror came clear and paralyzed her. If the thing in the bed was pretending to be someone, where was that someone now? Who was abroad in the night, and to what purpose?

Her panic sent her stumbling upstairs. She left the bedroom door open, so as to hear any sound in the house. She sat trembling on the bed and stared at the tight curtains. Only the restless light troubled the darkness beyond them.

Where had Paul been when he'd phoned? Oh, please let him have been nearly home! He wouldn't be long now — not long, please not long. She wished she had a drink to quiet her, but that would have meant going downstairs, closer to whatever was roaming the night.

If anything was. Mightn't her imagination, made hectic by all the strangeness, have got the better of her? Surely the figure in the bed could be a corpse. In the circumstances that would be reassuring. However disturbing, a corpse was hardly a threat.

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Minutes later she reached the window. Her reluctance made the carpet feel hindering as a marsh. At the curtains, her will seemed unequal to the struggle with her hands. But her hands sneaked past her fear, to the curtains, and opened a crack for her to peer through.

Silence closed around her. It drew her head forward and parted her hands to widen the gap between the curtains. Dim light wavered over the grey window, which appeared to hover in a block of night. With a painful slowness that released her breath in infrequent gasps, she made out what was beyond.

The blankets were rolled back from the bed; they slumped against the footboard. On the exposed mattress lay an old bolster. It was stained and looked split; what must be lumps of stuffing protruded from it. Over it the stifled light crawled.

She was staring dully, gripped by the ache of her fear, when something in the room moved. A shadow faltered on the blurred wall. Was someone unseen making for the window? Dry fear clutched her throat. Perhaps it was only the unsteady light, perhaps there was no shadow — for the light was making the bolster appear to shift.

Then, as her lungs agonized for breath, she saw that the object on the bed was indeed moving. It was struggling to raise itself. The lumps of stuffing might be, or might be trying to be, limbs. The swellings and discolorations at the top of the bolster could have been the beginnings of a travesty of a face.

Her mind fought to open her claws of hands, to thrust her away from the window. Was her fascination causing the nightmare to be played out before her? She was still striving to turn when the shadow fled across the wall and its source appeared beyond the gray window. His face was wrenched out of shape by terror, so that it took her moments to be sure that it was Paul. He had gone into the wrong house.

Her sobbing cry released her. She fell on the stairs but dragged herself erect with her bruised hands. A notion clung to her mind — that there had been a sound she ought to have heard. She hurled open the front door. The rockery glowed sodium, tangled in shadows of branches.

As she stood trying to control her mind, to fit together what might have happened, she glimpsed the flashing on the corner of the side road. How could traffic lights be blue? When she realized that it was an ambulance, she began to trudge toward it like a sleepwalker. Already she could see that one of the cars was Paul's. She hardly needed the sight of the draped

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form that the men in white were bearing away from his car to suggest how he'd been able to enter a house that no longer existed.

She stood on the pavement and began to shake. Could she enter that house too? But when she glanced back, her garden was bare beneath the orange glow. Only the rockery stood there like a cairn over a grave.

WINSLOW CRATER

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—Edward Bryant

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OUT, DAMNED SPOT!

I love coincidences! The more outrageous they are, the better. I love them if only because irrationalists are willing to pin so many garbage-filled theories on them, whereas I see them only for what they are — coincidences.

For instance, to take a personal example —

Back in 1925, my mother misrepresented my age for a noble motive. She told the school authorities I had been born on September 7, 1919, so that on September 7, 1925 I would be six years old and would qualify to enter the first grade the next day (for which I was more than ready).

Actually, I was born on January 2, 1920 and was not eligible for another half-year, but I was born in Russia and there were no American birth certificates against which to check my mother's statement.

In the third grade, I discovered that the school records had me down for a September 7 birthday, and I objected so strenuously that they made the change to the correct January 2, 1920.

Years later, during World War II, I worked as a chemist at the U.S. Navy Yard in Philadelphia (along with Robert Heinlein and L. Sprague de Camp, as it happens),

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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and that meant I was draft-deferred.

As the war wound down, however, and as my work grew less important in consequence, the gentlemen of my draft board looked at me with an ever-growing yearning. Finally, five days after V-J day, I received my induction notice and eventually attained the ethereal status of buck private.

That induction notice came on September 7, 1945, and at that time, only men under twenty-six years of age were being drafted. Had I not corrected my mother's misstatement of twenty years before, September 7 would have been my 26th birthday and I would not have been drafted.

But that is just a tiny coincidence. I have just come across an enormous one involving a historical figure, an even less likely one, I think, than I have recorded in connection with Pompey.* I will, of course, start at the beginning.

In medieval times, the scholars of western Europe went along with Aristotle's dictum that the heavenly bodies were unchanging and perfect. In fact, it must have seemed that to believe anything else would have been blasphemous since it would seem to impugn the quality of God's handiwork.

In particular, the Sun seemed perfect. It was a container suffused with heavenly light, and it had not changed from the moment of its creation. Nor would it change at any time in the future until the moment it pleased God to bring the Sun to an end.

To be sure, every once in a while, the Sun could be looked at with impunity when it shone through haze near the horizon, and then it appeared, at rare moments, as though there were some sort of spot on it. This could be interpreted as a small dark cloud, or, perhaps, the planet Mercury passing between the Sun and Earth. It was never thought to be an actual flaw in the Sun which was, by definition, flawless.

But then, toward the end of 1610, Galileo used his telescope to observe the Sun during the Sunset haze (a risky procedure which probably contributed to Galileo's eventual blindness) and saw dark spots on the sun's disc every time. Other astronomers, quickly learning to make use of telescopes, also reported these spots, and one of them was a German astronomer, Christopher Scheiner, who was a Jesuit.

Scheiner's superior, on hearing of the observation, warned Scheiner

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See POMPEY AND CIRCUMSTANCE, F&SF, May 1971

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against trusting his observations too far. Aristotle had, after all, made no mention of such spots and that meant they could not exist.

Scheiner therefore published his observations anonymously and said that the spots were small bodies that orbited the Sun and were not part of it. In that way, he held to the Aristotelian dictim of Solar perfection.

Galileo, who was short-tempered and particularly keen on retaining credit, argued the matter intemperately and, as was his wont, with brilliant sarcasm. (This aroused Jesuit hostility, which did its bit in bringing on Galileo's troubles with the Inquisition.)

Galileo insisted that his own observations were earlier and ridiculed the suggestion that the spots were not part of the Sun. He pointed out that at either limb of the Sun the spots moved more slowly and were foreshortened. He therefore deduced that the spots were part of the Solar surface and that their motion was the result of the Sun's rotation on its axis in a period of 27 days. He was quite correct in this, and the notion of Solar perfection died, to the chagrin of many in power, and this contributed to Galileo's eventual troubles, too.

After that, various astronomers would occasionally report Sunspots, or lack of Sunspots, draw sketches of their appearance and so on.

The next event of real interest came in 1774, when a Scottish astronomer, Alexander Wilson, noted that a large Sunspot, when approaching the limb of the Sun so that it was seen sideways, looked as though it were concave. He wondered whether the dim borders of the Sunspot might not be declivities, like the inner surface of a crater, and whether the dark center might not be an actual hole into the deeper reaches of the Sun.

This view was taken up in 1795 by William Herschel, the foremost astronomer of his time. He suggested that the Sun was an opaque cold body with a flaming layer of gases all about it. The Sunspots, by this view, were holes through which the cold body below could be seen. Herschel speculated that the cold body might be inhabited.

That turned out to be all wrong, of course, since, as it happens, the shining surface of the Sun is its coldest part. The farther one burrows into the Sun, the hotter it gets, until at the center the temperature is some fifteen million degrees. That, however, was not understood until the 1920s. Even the thin gases high above the Solar surface are hotter than the shining part we see, with temperatures in excess of a million degrees, though that was not understood until the 1940s.

As for Sunspots, they are not really black. They are a couple of thou-

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sand degrees cooler than the unspotted portion of the Sun's surface so that they radiate less light and look black by comparison. If, however, Mercury or Venus moves between ourselves and the Sun, each shows up on the Solar disc as a small, *really* black circle, and if that circle moves near a Sunspot, it can then be seen that the spot is not truly black.

Still, though the Wilson-Herschel idea was wrong, it roused further interest in Sunspots.

The real breakthrough came with a German pharmacist, Heinrich Samuel Schwabe, whose hobby was astronomy. He worked all day, however, so he could not very well sit up all night long looking at the stars. It occurred to him that if he could think up some sort of daytime astronomical task, he could observe during the slow periods at the shop.

A task suggested itself. Herschel had discovered the planet Uranus, and every astronomer now dreamed of discovering one. Suppose, then, there was a planet closer to the Sun than Mercury was. It would always be so near the Sun that it would be extremely difficult to detect it. Every once in a while, though, it might pass between the Sun and ourselves. Why not, then, watch the face of the Sun for any dark, moving circle.

It would be a piece of cake, if the spot were seen. It couldn't be a Sunspot which would not be perfectly round and would not travel across the face of the Sun as quickly as a planet would. Nor could it be Mercury or Venus, if those two planets were known to be located elsewhere. And anything but Mercury, Venus or a Sunspot, would be a new planet.

In 1825, Schwabe started observing the Sun. He didn't find any planet, but he couldn't help noting the Sunspots. After a while he forgot about the planet and began sketching the Sunspots, which changed in position and shape from day to day. He watched old ones die and new ones form and he spent no less than seventeen years (!) observing the Sun on every day that wasn't completely cloudy.

By 1843, he was able to announce that the Sunspots did not appear utterly at random. There was a cycle. Year after year there were more and more Sunspots till a peak was reached. Then the number declined until they were almost gone and a new cycle started. The length of time from peak to peak was about ten years.

Schwabe's announcement was ignored until the better-known scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, referred to it in 1851 in his book "Kosmos," a large overview of science.

At this time, the Scottish-German astronomer, Johann von Lamont,

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was measuring the intensity of Earth's magnetic field and had found that it was rising and falling in regular fashion. In 1852, a British physicist, Edward Sabine, pointed out that the intensity of Earth's magnetic field was rising and falling in time with the Sunspot cycle.

That made it seem that Sunspots affected the Earth, and so they began to be studied with devouring interest.

Each year came to be given a "Zürich Sunspot number" according to a formula first worked out in 1849 by a Swiss astronomer, Rudolf Wolf, who was, of course, from Zürich. (He was the first to point out that the incidence of auroras also rose and fell in time to the Sunspot cycle.)

Reports antedating Schwabe's discovery were carefully studied, and those years were given Sunspot numbers as well. We now have a sawtooth curve relating the Sunspot number to the years for a period of two and a half centuries. The average interval between peak and over that time is 10.4 years. This does not represent a metronome-like regularity by any means, though, since some peak-to-peak intervals are as short as 7 years and some are as long as 17 years.

What's more, the peaks are not all equally high. There was a peak in 1816 with a Sunspot number of only about 50. On the other hand, the peak in 1959 had a Sunspot of 200. In fact, the 1959 peak was the highest recorded. The next peak, in 1970, was only half as high.

Sunspots seem to be caused by changes in the Sun's magnetic field. If the Sun rotated in a single piece (as the Earth or any solid body does) the magnetic field might be smooth and regular and be contained largely below the surface.

Actually, the Sun does not rotate as a single piece. Portions of the surface farther from the Equator take longer to make a complete turn than do portions near the Equator. This results in a shear-effect which seems to twist the magnetic lines of force, squeezing them upward and out the surface.

The Sunspot appears at the point of emergence of the magnetic lines of force. (It was not till 1908, three centuries after the discovery of Sunspots, that the American astronomer, George Ellery Hale, detected a strong magnetic field associated with Sunspots.)

Astronomers have to work out reasons why the magnetic field waxes and wanes as it does; why the period varies both in length and intensity; why the Sunspots first appear at a high latitude at the beginning of a cycle and work their way closer to the Equator as the cycle progresses; why

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the direction of the magnetic field reverses with each new cycle and so on.

It isn't easy, for there are a great many factors involved, most of which are ill-understood (rather like trying to predict weather on the Earth), but there's no reason why, in the end, it shouldn't be worked out.

Of course, the changing magnetic field of the Sun produces changes in addition to the varying presences and positions of Sunspots. It alters the incidence of the Solar flares, the shape of the corona, the intensity of the Solar wind and so on. None of these things have any obvious interconnection, but the fact that all wax and wane in unison makes it clear that they must have a common cause.

Changes in the intensity of the Solar wind affect the incidence of auroras on Earth, of electrical storms, and probably alter the number and nature of the ionic seeds in the atmosphere about which raindrops can form. In that way, the weather can be affected by the Sunspot cycle, and, in consequence, the incidence of drought, of famine, of political unrest, might all be related to the Sunspot-cycle by enthusiasts.

In 1893, the British astronomer, Edward Walter Maunder, checking through early reports in order to set up data for the Sunspot cycle prior to the 18th Century, was astonished to find that there were virtually no reports on Sunspots between the years 1643 and 1715. (These boundary years are arbitrary to some extent. These, which I have chosen — for a hidden reason of my own, which I will reveal later — are just about right, however.)

There were fragmentary reports on numerous Sunspots and even sketches of their shapes in the time of Galileo, and of his contemporaries and immediate successors, but after that there was nothing. It wasn't that nobody looked. There were astronomers who did look and who reported that they could find no Sunspots.

Maunder published his findings in 1894 and again in 1922, but no one paid any attention to him. The Sunspot cycle was well-established and it didn't seem possible that anything would happen to affect it. An unspotted Sun was as unacceptable in 1900 as a spotted Sun had been in 1600.

But then, in the 1970s, the astronomer John A. Eddy, coming across the report of what he eventually called "the Maunder minimum," decided to look into the matter.

He found, on checking, that Maunder's reports were correct. The Italian-French astronomer, Giovanni Domenico Cassini, who was the

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leading observer of his day, observed a Sunspot in 1671 and wrote that it had been twenty years since Sunspots of any size had been seen. He was astronomer enough to have determined the parallax of Mars and to have detected the "Cassini division" in Saturn's rings, so he was surely competent to see Sunspots if there were any. Nor was he likely to be easily fooled by tales that there weren't any if those tales were false.

John Flamsteed, the Astronomer Royal of England, another very competent astronomer and careful observer, reported, at one time, that he had finally seen a Sunspot after seven years of looking.

Eddy investigated reports of naked-eye sightings of Sunspots from many regions, including the Far East, data which had been unavailable to Maunder. Such records date back to the 5th Century B.C. and generally yield five to ten sightings per century. (Only very large spots can be seen by the naked eye.) There are gaps, however, and one of those gaps spans the Maunder minimum.

Apparently, the Maunder minimum was well known until after Schwabe had worked out the Sunspot cycle, and it was then forgotten because it didn't fit the new knowledge. As a matter of fact, it may have been because of the Maunder minimum that it took so long after the discovery of Sunspots to establish the Sunspot cycle.

Nor is it only the reports of lack of Sunspots that establish the existence of the Maunder minimum. There are reports consistent with it that deal with other consequences of the Sun's magnetic field.

For instance, it is the Solar wind that sets up auroras, and the Solar wind is related to the magnetic field of the Sun, particularly to the outbursts of energetic Solar flares which are most common when the Sun is most magnetically active — that is, at times of high Sunspot incidence.

If there were few if any Sunspots over a 70-year period, it must have been a quiet time generally for the Sun from a magnetic standpoint, and the Solar wind must have been nothing but a zephyr. There should have been few if any auroras visible in Europe at that time.

Eddy checked the records and found that reports of auroras were indeed just about absent during the Maunder minimum. There were many reports after 1715 and quite a few before 1640, but just about none in between.

Again, when the Sun is magnetically active, the lines of force belly out from the Sun with much greater strength than they do when it is magnetically inactive. The charged particles in the Sun's outer atmosphere,

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or corona, tend to spiral about the lines of force, and do so in greater numbers, and more tightly, the stronger the lines of force are.

This means that the appearance of the corona during a total eclipse of the Sun changes according to the position of the Sun in the Sunspot cycle. When the number of Sunspots is near its peak and the magnetic activity of the Sun is high, the corona is full of streamers radiating out from the Sun, and it is then extraordinarily complex and beautiful.

When the number of Sunspots is low, there are few if any streamers, and the corona seems like a rather featureless haze about the Sun. It is then not at all remarkable.

Unfortunately, during the Maunder minimum, it was not yet the custom for astronomers to travel all over the world to see total eclipses (it wasn't as easy then, as it became later, to travel long distances), and so only a few of the over sixty total eclipses of the period were observed in detail. Still, those that were observed showed coronas that were, in every case, of the type associated with Sunspot minima.

The auroras and the corona are bits of entirely independent corroboration. There was no reason at the time to associate them one way or another with Sunspots, and yet all three items coincide as they should.

One more item, and the most telling of all —

There is always some radioactive carbon-14 in atmospheric carbon dioxide. It is produced by cosmic rays smashing into nitrogen atoms in the atmosphere. Plants absorb carbon dioxide and incorporate it into their tissues. If there happens to be more carbon-14 than usual in the atmospheric carbon dioxide in a particular year, then, in that year, the plant tissue that is laid down is richer than normal in that radioactive atom. The presence of carbon-14, whether slightly more or slightly less than normal, is always exceedingly tiny, but radioactive atoms can be detected with great delicacy and precision and even traces are enough.

Now it happens that when the Sun is magnetically active, its magnetic field bellies so far outward that the Earth itself is enveloped by it. The field serves to deflect some of the cosmic rays so that less carbon-14 is formed and deposited in plant tissues.

When the Sun's magnetic field shrinks at the time of Sunspot minima, the Earth is not protected, so that more cosmic rays strike and more carbon-14 is formed and deposited.

In short, plant tissue formed in years of Sunspot minima are unusually high in carbon-14, while plant tissue formed in years of Sunspot

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maxima are unusually low in carbon-14.

Trees lay down thicknesses of wood from year to year, and these are visible as tree-rings. If we know the year when a tree was cut down and count the rings backward from the bark, one can associate any ring with a particular year.

If each tree-ring is shaved off and is separately analyzed for its carbon-14 content (making allowance for the fact that the carbon-14 content declines with the years as the atoms break down at a known rate) one can set up a Sunspot cycle without ever looking at the Solar records. (This is a little risky, of course, since there may be other factors that raise and lower the carbon-14 content of atmospheric carbon dioxide in addition to the behavior of the Sun's magnetic field.)

As it happens, tree-rings dating from the second half of the 17th Century are indeed unusually high in carbon-14, which is one more independent confirmation of the Maunder minimum.

In fact, tree-ring data is better than anything else for two reasons. In the first place, it does not depend on the record of human observations which is naturally subjective and incomplete. Secondly, whereas human observations are increasingly scanty as we move back in time before 1700, tree-ring data is solid for much longer periods.

In fact, if we make use of bristlecone pines, the living objects with the most extended lifetimes, we can trace back the variations in carbon-14 for five thousand years; in short, throughout historic times.

Eddy reports that there seem to be some twelve periods over the last five thousand years in which Solar magnetic activity sank low, the extended minimal lasting from fifty to a couple of hundred years. The Maunder minimum is only the latest of these.

Before the Maunder minimum there was an extended minimum from 1400 to 1510. On the other hand there were periods of particularly high activity such as one between 1100 and 1300.

Apparently, then, there is a long-range Sunspot cycle on which the short-range cycle discovered by Schwabe is superimposed. There are periods when the Sun is quiet and the magnetic field is weak and well behaved and the Sunspots and other associated phenomena are virtually absent. Then there are periods when the Sun is active and the magnetic field is undergoing wild oscillations in strength so that Sunspots and associated phenomena reach decennial peaks.

What causes this long-range oscillation between Maunder minima and Schwabe peaks?

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I said earlier that the Sunspots seem to be caused by the differential rotation of different parts of the Solar surface. What, then, if there were no difference in rotation?

From drawings of Sunspots made by the German astronomer, Johannes Hevelius, in 1644, just at the beginning of the Maunder minimum, it seems that the Sun may have been rotating all in one piece at that time. There would therefore be no shear, no twisted magnetic lines of force, nothing but a quiet well-behaved magnetic field — a Maunder minimum.

But what causes the Sun periodically to turn in one piece and produce Maunder minima and then to develop a differential rotation and produce Schwabe peaks?

I'm glad to be able to answer that interesting question clearly and briefly. — No one knows.

And what happens on Earth when there is a Maunder minimum? As it happens, during that period Europe was suffering a "little Ice Age" when the weather was colder than it had been before or was to be afterward. The previous extended minimum from 1400 to 1510 also saw cold weather. The Norse colony in Greenland finally died out under the stress of cold after it had clung to existence for over four centuries.

But that may be only coincidence, and I have a better example.

What is the chance that a monarch will reign for 72 years? Obviously very little. Only one monarch in European history has managed to reign that long, and that was Louis XIV of France.

Given a reign of that length, and a Maunder minimum of that length, what are the odds against the two matching exactly? Enormous, I suppose, but as it happens, Louis XIV ascended the throne on the death of his father in 1643 and remained king till he died in 1715. He was king precisely through the Maunder minimum.

Now, in his childhood, Louis XIV had been forced to flee Paris to escape capture by unruly nobles during the civil war called the Fronde. He never forgave either Paris or the nobles.

After taking the reins of government into his own hands upon the death of his minister, Jules Mazarin, in 1661; Louis decided to make sure it would never happen again. He planned to leave Paris and build a new capital at Versailles in the suburbs. He planned to set up an elaborate code of etiquette and symbolism that would reduce the proud nobility into a set of lackeys who would never dream of rebelling.

He would, in short, make himself the unrivalled symbol of the state

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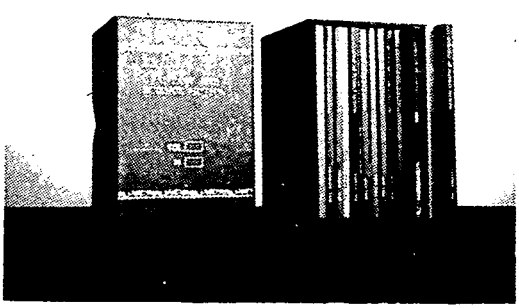
("I am the state" he said), with everyone else shining only by the light of the king.

He took as his symbol, then, the unrivalled ruler of the Solar system, the Sun, from which all other bodies borrowed light. He called himself "Le Roi Soleil."

And so it happened that the ruler whose long reign exactly coincided with the period when the Sun shone in pure and unspotted majesty — something whose significance could not possibly have been understood at the time — called himself, and is still known as, "the Sun King."

That's a beautiful coincidence — until the irrationalists focus their peanut brains upon it and try to give it some significance it doesn't have.



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Around the bar at the annual meeting in Writer's Heaven (the third and final story of a series), in which is answered the question: why is this place truly a heaven for writers?

The Annual Bash and Circumstance Party

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

Once per annum, celestial time operating for our convenience on the same clock as Earthbound time, this being another of the facilities offered by Writer's Heaven, there is a great drinking party in which reminiscences are exchanged, current evaluations are made, and the courses that will be taken for the next year are plotted. Those courses are always the same, we being a rather routinized and unambitious lot at the present time, but these calculations and recalculations give us a feeling of purposefulness and progress, something without which even the least of us would feel abandoned. There is nothing wrong with an eternity devoted to drunkenness, copulation or sloth, so long as there are surrounding rationalizations of a metaphysic type, and so the party serves a most important function. The ultimate function is beyond the facilities of the management to offer us, although they surely would if not prohibited by tenet.

It is this evening of the once per annum bash and circumstance party which I accordingly recount. All of us are there except those who are too deeply incapacitated, such as Uncle Sam Clemens, to leave their quarters, but even the absentees are with us in spirit, and messages of a cheerful type are related back and forth even to those. Ring and Little Red and Tom and Big Ernie are here; the Royal Russian himself is in a corner sipping upon aperitif and considering all of us gloomily; and in addition to these personages who have already played parts in certain descriptions of events past (the famous Carson and Flannery have consented to come but only if placed at opposite sides of the bar, interceded by many bodies which will prohibit the exchange of quips), there are

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many who have not been previously mentioned. No chronicler can be absolutely complete. Standing against one of the walls with a large and bright gin in my hand, occupying the role of participant-observer with which I have had my many great social successes, I take note of those who are there, to say nothing of the respective statuses which they are said to occupy.

For the occasion the bartender is not one of the irregulars who pass in and out of our circumstances but is none other than the beloved Chuck Seraphim himself. Chuck Seraphim, a special emissary from headquarters, is rumored to have the most significant ties to management, and since he is an impressive-looking person with large mustaches and a florid complexion, it would be difficult to reject this information out of hand. Chuck is seen only at special occasions on bar duty: the annual once-a-year bash as well as certain religious or sentimental occasions. His presence is always a signal thus of important and meaningful events, although he is little more than a nominal bartender and has no understanding whatsoever of the important relationship between gin and vermouth in the standard martinis, thinking it to be equal. Despite this, he is well-liked by those who have had occasion to deal with him, mostly because of the high floridity of his person and the sense that Chuck's dislike might act in contraindictive fashion to one's continued peaceful residence within these premises.

Chuck, with only slight fumbling over difficult pronunciations during which he takes out a handkerchief to wipe his streaming but friendly visage, does the annual report. Scott is holding, Big Ernie continues to fall as fast as a twinkling star. Baby Eugene is slightly up, although there are certain weaknesses indicated. Ring is down. Flannery is down. Carson is down. I would be down if there were any position from which I could fall, but I reached, as they like to say in the other regions, the absolute nadir many reports ago. As a courtesy, however, my name is included among those whose status is *unchanged.* John M. is down, as is John S. and John O., the three big Johns glower at one another and make threatening gestures toward Chuck the Seraphim. It is all taken as being in good fun, which of course it is not.

Dashiell continues to go up. Good work being done on his behalf. Supported by the hands and elbows of a few pulp-type personages in the corner, Dashiell rises to acknowledge with a cheerless wave the polite applause. He has proven despite many humiliations to have more staying power than almost

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any of us. Big Bill is down. Ray is due for another revival, at least half of one, but in the meantime he continues to sink. Dashiell winks at him. The two prominent new arrivals, Corporal Jim and the Royal Russian, are greeted by name and welcomed officially to the premises. They are reminded that funeral eulogies of a praiseworthy sort cannot be said to count and that therefore their first status report cannot be given until next year. Corporal Jim grips his glass of white wine more tightly and downs it with a frozen swallow, his eyes set. The Royal Russian giggles. Chuck the Seraphim pays his regards to those assembled considered too lacking in data to have a report this year. This is merely the management's way of being kind; everyone knows that these are people who have not been thought of, once, by anyone during the previous year. He asks then, in a routine way, for motions from the floor.

"I move," Big Ernie says, "that the size of the drinks be doubled. Also that, in truth, beds and bedding be placed inside so that those of us who would dwell may dwell. And that kindness be shown, a simple and true regard. We have purchased our peace with our souls."

Big Ernie makes this motion every year. Chuck the Seraphim shrugs. "We can double the drinks if you want," he says. "They are all free regardless, so it does not matter. The respect part you have always had; that is what you are here for. Nothing on the beds and bedding though. There are zoning laws. Can't be done."

"Truthfully you do not care," Big Ernie says. "You do not care for our dignity." He makes this response every year too, ritual being very important to Big Ernie, as all of us scholars of his collected works know. "You do not care," he says, running fingers through his impressive beard. "But that is all right. I do not care either. I have seen the spiritual hole: the *nada.*" He lifts his glass shakily, spilling a quantity of bourbon over his right shoetip. John O., standing next to him, makes a gesture of revulsion and backs away, slapping at a stain on his country club jodhpurs. He mutters something to Big Ernie, whose face convulses with rage, but as is the case with all of Big Ernie's rages, it goes away quickly and his features are slack and peaceful once more. In the truth, as Big Ernie would say, he has very little ambition at the present time and he never did. All that he wants is that stasis, that *nada* of which he has so often and fortuitously apprised us, and here in Writer's Heaven he is getting some, although not enough.

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Enoughness they could not offer him without breaking all the rules of the management.

"I move that the annual reports and circumstances be discontinued," I say after a pause in the conversation indicates that there are no other motions going to be made, and I wish to add a certain enlivening degree in order to justify Chuck's personal appearance at this time. "They have served their usefulness and no longer have any real purpose. We should be freed of the so-called professional rivalry here since we are all, as it were, eight-to-five shots who have busted out. Life is seven-to-five against, as I have previously noted; we ought to at least get even money here."

Ring says, "The only reason you want to discontinue the rankings is because you have none. You're totally forgotten. Nobody's read your work in years."

"And yours?" I say. Ring blushes. He is belligerent but embarrasses with equal facility, which is one of his charms. "No," I say, "it is not for that reason. All of us are forgotten in time. It is because the annual reports keep us from accepting our fate, which is to be forgotten, that I urge their abolition. They merely forestall the inevitable, the foreseen, the necessary. I do not have to tell you the results in the Russian and French Quarters where annual reports were abolished of necessity. Here they should be voluntarily."

"I will discuss this with the management," Chuck says. "I will present it to them as you have presented it to me."

"I do this atwixt and akin every year," I point out without rancorousness, "and every year the management in due course fails to respond."

"I have nothing to do with that," Chuck says.

"I wish you would do a better job of conveying my request."

Chuck shows me his palms flat-out like a busted turf advisor. "I can do nothing better than to undertake with them to see your position," he says. "After that, it is out of my hands."

"I think the management would be well-advised to make a personal appearance," I say. "The management is dodging its responsibilities, sending one of the emissary persuasion when it should make its own way."

"I will take that up as well with the management," Chuck says. "I will discuss with them your position."

"I wish you would convey the sensibilities of my request without my making a direct appeal."

"You cannot make a direct appeal."

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"That is so," I say, "but I can create some amount of revolutionary ardor amidst the assembled here, all of whom are known for their personal irascibility."

"You will create nothing," Chuck says. This happens to be quite true — our discussion, far from arousing revolutionary ardor has resulted only in an intensified clinking of glasses, gulping and murmurings of boredom — and I decide on the instant to accept it. It is important at the once-a-year circumstance bash, I feel, that at least one of us point out that we are persons of some independence and have more in our minds than an eternity of drink and quieter solaces, but having done that, I see no reason to make an issue of it. Principle should never stand in the way of a good drink. I nod at Chuck, raise my glass on high and take it down. He winks at me. He is not a bad personage, and he is, of course, no less than anyone else simply trying to do his job. It is not an enviable position and I would not know what to do with it myself.

"Are there further comments or motions or questions from the floor?" Chuck asks and there are of course none. There would have been none a long time ago had it not been for Big Ernie and me. "I therefore," Chuck says after a reasonable and polite pause, "declare the formal annual meeting at an end. The celebrations may begin." He takes a towel from underneath the bar and wipes his hands determinedly. "I will now set up anyone who wants to be set up," and in the general rush of compliance he is completely obscured from me and, for all I know, from the world itself.

The festivities, it has been announced, may begin, but except for the rush of those to refill there is really no change in the general temper of the room. It is the same as every other day except that there are many more people in attendance under compulsory statute. John O. continues to give contemptuous glances at Big Ernie, who waves his fist and calls for Scott to enter so that he can beat him up again. Scott, no dummy, is in the brothel on special dispensation and has not been out for years. Carson and Flannery, at peace for once, are listening quietly to Virginia, who off in a corner is giving them a lecture on the higher points of poetics. Every now and then a word emerges from the lecture like *waters* or *schizophrenia* or *royalties,* and I feel my respect for Virginia on the rare occasions that I see her multiply; she is a sensible person. So is Emily, a lively, fluttery little woman who, giggling off in a corner with Aunt Marianne and Cousin Sylvia, looks

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exactly like a dressmaker for some of the famous Broadway musicals that in my time I have known intimately. The ladies share the men's vices, but in many ways are easier to get along with and more pleasant to know. Perhaps that is because they felt less pressure, but, then again, and as the Royal Russian might point out, it is of a mystery and not to be solved within the blunt and rusty intellectual tools which we have been given. There is certainly very little mixing of the sexes in the Writer's Heaven bar; this may come from simple shyness, but I have a more logical explanation: the brothel, for the types who inhabit the Heaven, takes care of all they care to know of the sacred male-female compact by which the world is supposed to but does not often partake.

At length I find myself in conversation with Dashiell over in an opposite corner. Dashiell, a thin type with penetrating eyes and a dick's clumsiness, is one of the most companionable sort, and it is a shame that I see him only at the once-a-year circumstance bash, Dashiell having gone in for heavy sleeping and meditation now while he continues on a lengthy drying-out process interrupted only occasionally by five-day drunks which destroy the cure. He is very drunk now. "It *is* heaven," Dashiell says to me, patting his mustache, "it is all that we could have asked. I was never a man of much faith, an agnostic maybe, *prove it to me,* you know, and I must say that this is better than I could have asked."

"It is a remarkable place," I agree. "It has its points. One could be happy here."

"It is Writer's Heaven." Dashiell says with a sigh and drinks a malt chaser. "It is a Writer's Heaven because we do not have to write. I do not have to write any more, do you understand?" He grasps me of the lapels, gives me his penetrating dick's stare. "Do you know what heaven that is?"

"But, Dashiell," I say failing to disengage myself out of politeness, allowing myself to stay in position out of my genuine fondness and not to embarrass a very real person, "I accept what you are saying, but in honesty a qualification must be made because you did not write for years and years before you entered these premises, about twenty by my rough count, and therefore you could be said to have achieved the heavenly state before passage. Not to write is wonderful but can be achieved on Earth."

"You don't understand," Dashiell says, letting his hands drop, his eyes filled with pain and wisdom. "You are a good person and, considering your back

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ground, more intelligent and aware than you might be, but you do not understand at all. It is not heaven because I am not writing. Any fool can achieve, as you say, that circumstance. It is heaven for another reason."

"And what," I say, eager to humor a great old trouper, one of the very best of his time and almost as much of a help to generations of plagiarists as me, "what, if I may ask, is the reason, if you are not writing here as on Earth."

"Because," Dashiell says after a properly timed trouper's pause, "because, Damon, I don't *want* to, anymore."

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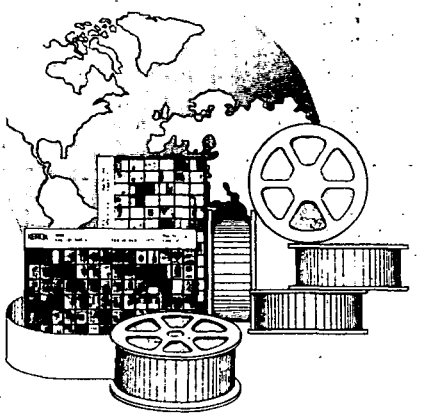

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Here is the second part of Tom Disch's great new novel. If you missed part one, the author's synopsis will bring you quickly up to date. Or, send us $1.50 and we'll rush you a copy of the February issue with part one.

On Wings of Song

(2nd of 3 parts)

by THOMAS M. DISCH

Synopsis of Part I: At the age of five Daniel Weinreb is taken from New York City to live in Amesville, Iowa, where his father, a bankrupt dentist, is establishing a new practice. Four years later his mother Milly (who had run off with the stereo and the silver just before the bankruptcy) rejoins them, destitute and determined to sacrifice the chancy freedoms of the liberal but impoverished Eastern seaboard for the comfort and security of the Farm Belt, which has become a garrison state, controlled by the reactionary, fundamentalist Undergoders. Milly impresses on her son the necessity for conformity and even hypocrisy, particularly with respect to the divisive issue of flight.

It has become possible, using the new electronic flight apparatus, to achieve out-of-body flight —on condition that the user of the apparatus is able to sing with perfect artistry. Undergoders oppose discorporal flight, ostensibly on religious grounds (since the experiences of those who achieve flight do not accord with fundamentalist ideas of the soul and its afterlife), but for the further compelling reason of sour grapes: they can't do it. Use or possession of a flight apparatus is a criminal offense throughout the Farm Belt; newspapers and broadcasts from out-of-state that promote or condone discorporal flight are similarly outlawed.

Daniel, at age fourteen, hitchhikes to Minneapolis to see a banned musical about flight, *Gold-Diggers of 1984,* with his best friend, Eugene Mueller, son of Amesville's ex-mayor, Roy. During the movie Eugene disappears and Daniel must return to Amesville alone. When the fact of the trip to Minneapolis is discovered, Roy Mueller refuses to believe that Daniel was not party to his son's absconding — with $845. Mueller arranges for Daniel to be arrested for delivering the banned Minneapolis *Star-Tribune,* an offense the law customarily overlooks. Daniel is sentenced to the State Correction Facility at Spirit Lake.

Spirit Lake is a nightmare revelation of the realities of the police state Daniel has been living in unawares. It appears to be an "open" prison. Bars and close surveillance are unneces-

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sary, since each prisoner carries a P-W lozenge in the lining of his stomach, which will be detonated by radio signals if he goes beyond the perimeter of camp. Prisoners are forced to work long hours and must supplement their starvation rations with food sold at extortionate prices by the guards. Prisoners without money or friends outside the prison are doomed to starve. Winter comes and prison conditions become more desperate. Daniel works at a plant that processes termites into food extenders. He forms a friendship with another prisoner, Barbara Steiner, who describes her single experience of flight, and Daniel forms the ambition to learn to fly. This means he must learn to sing. He approaches another prisoner, Gus, the most capable musician in the camp, and offers him his supplementary rations if he will give him singing lessons. Gus makes a counterproposal that Daniel, still a puritanical Iowan at heart, rejects indignantly. Vengefully, Gus tells Daniel he will never be able to fly since he lacks musical talent: "You could take voice lessons from here till doomsday and you'd never get *near* escape velocity. You're too tight. Too mental. Too much the Iowa type." Nevertheless, on the night before he leaves Spirit Lake, Daniel has a dream that seems an augury of his eventual success in flying.

PART 2

The clouds over Switzerland were pink puffy lobes of brain with, at intervals, great splintered bones of granite thrusting up through them. She loved the Alps, but only when she was above them. She loved France too, all purposeful and rectilinear in solemn shades of dun and olive-tinged viridian. She loved the whole round world, which seemed, at this moment, to be present to view in all its revolving glory, as the Concorde rose still higher.

On the console before her she jabbed the numbers of her wish, and in an instant the beneficent mechanism beside her seat ejected yet another pink lady, her third. Apparently it made no difference, at this altitude, that she was only seventeen. It was all so lawless and lovely, and she loved it all, the pink ladies, the almonds, the off-blue Atlantic whizzing by below. She loved most of all to be returning home at long, long last and to be saying farewell and fuck you to the grey walls, grey skies, and grey smocks of Ste. Ursule.

Boadicea Whiting was an enthusiast. She could, with the same heartfelt, if fleeting passion of appreciation, applaud the world's least raindrop or its most lavish hurricane. But she was no scatterbrain. She had other passions more abiding, and the chief of these was for her father, Mr. Grandison Whiting. She had not seen him for nearly two years, not even on cassettes, since he was fastidious about his personal correspondence and would send only hand-written letters. Though he'd written quite regularly, and though he was quite right (in matters of taste he was infallible), she had missed him terribly, missed the warmth and light of his presence, like a plant kept from the sun, like a nun. What a life it is, the life of repentence — or rather, what a life it isn't! But (as he'd written in one of his weekly letters) the only way to learn

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the price of something is to pay for it. And (she'd replied, though the letter was never sent) pay it and pay it.

The seatbelt sign winked off, and Boadicea unstrapped herself and climbed the short winding staircase to the lounge. One other passenger had beat her to the bar, a heavy, red-faced man in a really ugly red blazer. Synthetic, she thought — a judgment against which there could be no appeal. A sin (Grandison was wont to say) may be forgiven, but not a synthetic. The man in the blazer was complaining, nasally, to the steward at the bar that every time he'd ordered a drink during takeoff the goddamn idiot machine had flashed a goddamn sign at him to say sorry, he wasn't old enough, and goddamn it, he was thirty-two! With each "goddamn," he would glance at Boadicea to see if she were scandalized. She couldn't keep from beaming at the steward's explanation — that the computer had got the man's passport or seat number mixed up with someone else's. The man mistook the meaning of her smile. With the miraculous self-regard of his kind, he came over and offered her a drink. She said she would like a pink lady.

Would four be a mistake, she wondered? Would it prevent her, when she arrived, from shining? It would scarcely do to leave in disgrace and return, two years later, drunk. So far, however, she felt in command of herself, if maybe slightly more susceptible than usual.

"Aren't the clouds beautiful?" she said, when he'd returned with the drink and they had settled down before their first-class view of heaven.

Dismissing the question with a sociable smile, he asked if this were her first trip to America. Evidently, Ste. Ursule had done its work. She said, no, it had been her first trip to Europe and now she was coming back.

He asked her what she had seen. She said she'd seen art museums and churches mostly. "And you?" she asked.

"Oh, I didn't have time to go in for that kind of thing. It was a business trip."

"Oh. What business are you in?" She felt a guttersnipe delight in asking that most American of questions.

"I'm a representative for Consolidated Food Systems."

"Really? My uncle is a representative too, though not for CFS. He has some connection with them, though."

"Well, CFS is the biggest company in Des Moines. So it's not surprising."

"Is that where you live?"

"I live just about anywhere CFS cares to send me, and at this point they've sent me just about anywhere." He had that down pat. She wondered if it were something he'd made up himself at one time, or if all the CFS salesmen learned it when they were being trained. Then he took her by surprise. "Do you know," he said, in a tone of completely believable regret, and even thoughtfulness, "I do have an apartment in Omaha, but I haven't seen the inside of it for over a year."

At once she felt guilty for baiting him. And why? Because he had a paunch and didn't know how to dress? Because his voice was the whining, for-

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lorn voice of the prairie? Because he had wanted the few minutes of their passage across the ocean to bear the stamp of an actual human encounter? Didn't *she*, after all?

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I think I may be drunk," she said. "I'm not used to airplanes."

The clouds were now so far below they looked like a formica tabletop, opaque white whorled with a dismal greyish blue. In fact, the ledge on which she'd placed her drink was made of just such lamentable formica.

"But I like," she added, a little desperately, as he continued simply staring, "to fly. I think I could spend my whole life on the wing, just whizzing about like this. Whiz, whiz."

He looked at his watch so as not to have to look before him at the blue beyond the glass. Even here, she realized, even at twenty-five thousand feet, it was bad form to praise the act and power of flight. America!

"And where do *you* live?" he asked.

"In Iowa, on a farm."

"Is that so? A farmer's daughter." He fairly underlined his innuendo.

She could *not* keep hold of a sense of fairness. Everything about the man was an offense to decency — his flat, uninflected speech, his complacence, his stupidity. He seemed thoroughly to deserve his wretched life, and she wanted, meanly, to make him see the actual squalid shape of it.

"Yes, that's me. Though if one has to be any particular kind of daughter these days, that's the kind to be. Don't you agree?"

He agreed, with a sufficient sense of having been deflated. He knew what she meant. She meant she had money and he did not, and that this was a superior advantage to being of the advantaged sex.

"My name is Boadicea," she informed him, seeming to offer, briefly, her hand, but then, before he could respond, reaching for her drink.

"Boadicea," he repeated, changing every vowel.

"My friends call me Bo, or sometimes Boa."

Among a certain class this would have been enough. But he was certainly not of that class, nor ever would be, though it was clear from the way his eyes were fixed on her now, that the wish lingered on.

"And my *father* calls me Bobo." She sighed theatrically. "It is hard to go through life with such a peculiar name, but my father is a fanatical Anglophile, as was his father before him. Both Rhodes scholars! I'm fairly sure my brother won't be though. *His* name is Serjeant, and my sister's is Alethea. I'm lucky, I suppose, that I wasn't christened Britannia. Though as to nicknames, then I'd have had a choice between Brit and Tania. Do *you* like England?"

"I've been there, but only on business."

"Does business lift you up so far, then, that liking simply doesn't enter in?"

"Well, it rained most of the time I was there, and the hotel I stayed in was so cold I had to wear my clothes to bed, and there was food rationing

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then, which is why I was sent there to begin with. But aside from that I guess I liked it well enough. The people were friendly, the ones I had to deal with."

She looked at him with a blank smile and sipped the pink lady, which had begun to seem cloying. From marveling at the elegance and bitchery of what she'd just said, she hadn't taken in a word of his.

"I find," he said resolutely, "that people usually are, if you let 'em."

"Oh, people ... yes. I think so too. People are wonderful. You're wonderful, I'm wonderful, and the steward has wonderful red hair, though not as wonderful by half as my father's. I have a theory about red hair."

"What's that?"

"I believe it's a sign of spiritual distinction. Swinburne had intensely red hair."

"Who was Swinburne?"

"The greatest poet of Victorian England."

He nodded. "There's Dolly Parsons too. Her hair's pretty red."

"Who's Dolly Parsons?"

"The faith healer. On TV."

"Oh. Well, it's only a theory."

"Some of the things she does are pretty incredible too. A lot of people really believe in her. I've never heard anyone else say it was her hair though. I've got a cousin out in Arizona — he's got red hair and says he hates it. He says people are always ribbing him about it, give him funny looks."

She felt, as she was listening to the steady unreeling of his witless well-meaning speech, as if she had mounted a carrousel, which was now revolving too fast for her to get off. The plane had canted several degrees to the left. The sun had moved noticeably *higher* in the west, so that its light made vast semaphores on the heaving waves, from which the clouds had all been wiped away.

"You must excuse me," she said and hastily left the lounge.

In the washroom a dim green light seemed to spill from the mirrors in a manner at once weird and reassuring. It would have been a wholly habitable refuge if only there hadn't been, in each of the mirrors, the self-reproach of her own image.

Lord knows, she tried. How many weeks of her life had she wasted trying to subdue and civilize this other Boadicea, dressing her in overpriced designer clothes that ceased to be *soigné* the moment she removed them from their splendid boxes, dieting to the verge of anorexia, and fussing with creams, lotions, lashes, pots of rouge, copying on the oval canvas of her face the faces of Rubens, of Modigliani, of Reni and Ingres. But always behind these viscid masks was the same too full, too lively face, framed by the same abundant, intractable mid-brown hair, which was her mother's hair. Indeed, she was her mother's daughter through and through, except her mind, which was her own. But who is solaced by a sense of having perspicuous intellectual gifts? No one, certainly, who is drunk and surrounded by mirrors and wants, more than anything else in the world, to be loved by the likes of Grandison Whiting, a man who has declar-

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ed that the first duty of an aristocrat is to his own wardrobe.

Wealth, Grandison Whiting had told his children, is the foundation of a good character, and though he might say some things, like the remark about the wardrobe, only for effect, he was sincere about this. Wealth was also, he would allow, the root of evil, but that was just the reverse of the coin, a logical necessity. Money was freedom, as simple as that, and people who had none, or little, could not be judged by the same standards as those who had some, or much, for they were not free agents. Virtue, therefore, was an aristocratic prerogative, and vice as well.

This was just the beginning of Grandison Whiting's system of political economy, which went, in all its corollaries and workings-out, much farther and deeper than Boadicea had ever been allowed to follow, for at certain crucial moments in the unfolding of his system she had been required to go off to bed, or the gentlemen would remove themselves from the table to have their ideas and their cigars in masculine seclusion. Always, it seemed, that moment would come just when she thought she had begun to see him as he truly was — not the kindly, careless Santa Claus of a father indulging her in her girlish adorations, but the *real* Grandison Whiting whose renaissance energies seemed a more potent argument for the existence of God than any of the feeble notions of apologetics that she'd been required to learn by heart at Ste. Ursule. Ste. Ursule itself had been the most drastic of these exiles from his presence. Though she had come to understand the need for it (with her analyst's help), though she had even wrung a consent from her own heart at the last, the two years' exile from her father had been bitter bread indeed — all the more bitter because she had so clearly brought it on herself.

It had begun, as all her sorrows did, with an enthusiasm. She'd received a video camera for her fourteenth birthday, the latest model Editronic. Within three weeks she had so completely mastered the programs of which the camera was capable, and their various combinations, that she was able to construct a documentary about the operations and daily life of Worry (as the Whiting estate, and the film, was called) that was at once so smooth, so lively, and so professionally innocuous that it was shown in prime time on the state educational channel. This, in addition to what she called her "real movies," which, if less suited to public broadcast, were no less prodigious. Her father gave his approval and encouragement—what else could he have done? — and Boadicea, exalted, exultant, was swept up by a passion of creativity as by a tornado.

In the three months following her freshman year of high school she mastered a range of equipment and programming techniques that would have required as many years of study at a technical college. Only when, with her father's help, she had obtained her mail-order diploma and a union license did she put forth the proposal that she had all along been working toward.

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Would he, she asked, let her make an in-depth study of his own life? It would be a companion piece to *Worry,* but on a much loftier scale both as to length and to intensity.

At first he refused. She pleaded. She promised it would be a tribute, a monument, an apotheosis. He temporized, declaring that while he believed in her genius, he also believed in the sanctity of private life. Why should he spend a million dollars on the security of his house and grounds and then allow his own Bobo to expose that dear-bought privacy to the common gaze? She promised that no sanctums would be violated; that her film would do for him what Eisenstein had done for Stalin, what Riefenstahl had done for Hitler. *She* adored him, and she wanted the world to kneel beside her. It would, she knew it would, if only he could let her have the chance. At last — what else could he have done? — he consented, with the proviso that if he did not approve the finished product, it would be shown to no one else.

She went to work at once, with that fresh and resistless energy that only adolescence can command, and a skill very nearly equal to her energy. The first rushes were in the promised hieratic manner and made Grandison Whiting seem even more Grandisonian than he did off-screen. He moved through the sceneries of his life with the ponderous, hypnotic grace of a Sun-King, his bright red hair forming a kind of aureole about his palely perfect Celtic face. Even his clothes seemed to allegorize some inner, unfailing nobility.

The film's fascination for Grandison himself must have been as irresistible as it was embarrassing. It was so patently an act of worship. But it might, for all that, have its use. The resources of art are not often devoted so unstintingly, after all, to celebrating the *values* of the very rich; or when they were, there is liable to be a perceptible sense of a commodity being bought and paid for, a smell, as of banks of cut flowers, that is sweet but not wholly natural. Boadicea's film had none of the high gloss of captive art, and yet it was, possibly, in its headlong way, a real achievement.

The work went on. Boadicea was allowed to resume her school attendance at the Amesville High School on a reduced schedule so as to have advantage of the daylight hours. As she felt more secure in the possession of her skills, she permitted herself liberties, little lyric departures from the early grand manner of the film. She caught her father, quite unawares, rough-housing with Dow-Jones, his spaniel bitch. She recorded minutes, and soon whole cassettes, of his authentic, and delectable, table talk, and one of these occasions was when her Uncle Charles was on hand. Uncle Charles was the head of the House Ways and Means Committee. She followed her father about on a business trip to Omaha and Dallas, and there was some satisfactory footage of what *seemed* bona fide wheeling and dealing.

She knew, though, that it was not, and she became obsessed (both as artist and as daughter) with penetrating to

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those shadowed recesses of his life where (she believed) he was most fully himself. She knew that what he ventured to say before her cameras differed essentially from what he would have said in candor, among friends, differed still from what, in his soul, he held to be truth. Or rather she suspected this, for with his children Grandison Whiting would only throw out the most equivocal hints as to his own opinions on any matters more serious than questions of taste and comportment. Instead, he had a donnish knack for showing how, *on the one hand*, one might think *this*, or, on the other hand, *that;* leaving it quite up in the air which of the twain, if either, represented the convictions of Grandison Whiting.

As the film progressed and, then, as it did not progress, Boadicea found herself running up against this equivocalness in everything her father said, in his very smiles. The more she considered, the less she understood, though she continued, still, to adore. It could not be that her father simply lacked a coherent view of the world and his place in it, that he did whatever had to be done to advance his interests on the basis of mere everyday expedience. This may have been the case with her Uncle Charles (who was, in the way of much younger brothers, as devoted to Grandison as Boadicea herself); it may be the case with many men who inhabit the corridors of power by birthright rather than by conquest; but it was not the case with *him*, not conceivably.

She began to pry. Left alone in his office, she would read the papers lying on his desk; she searched the drawers. She eavesdropped on phone calls, on his conversations with the staff and operations personnel, on their conversations about him. She learned nothing. She began to spy. With the equipment and competence she'd acquired in order to make her films she was able to bug his office, his private sitting room, and the smoking room. Grandison knew this, for his million-dollar security system was proof against much more formidable assaults than this, but he allowed it to go on. He simply refrained from saying anything in these rooms that he would not have said before a delegation from the Iowa Council of Churches. Indeed, one of the colloquys that Boadicea was audience to was with such a delegation, who had come to enlist her father's support (and through him, her uncle's) for legislation that would withhold federal funds from all states and cities that did not enforce existing antiflight laws. Grandison was never more eloquent, though the delegation received no more, in the end, than his signature — and not on a check at that, but on a petition.

She could not turn back. It was no longer for the movie's sake or for the sake of any rational need. She surrendered, as to a long-resisted vice. With shame and with a trembling foreboding that there must be evil consequences to so unseemly an act, yet with a maenad, reckless pleasure in the very enormity of the risk, she placed a microphone behind the headboard of the bed in their best guest room. His father's mistress, Mrs. Reade, was expect-

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ed to be visiting Worry soon. She was also a friend of long-standing and the wife of the director of an Iowa insurance company in which Grandison held a controlling interest. Surely in these circumstances her father would reveal *something.*

Her father did not go to Mrs. Reade's room till late in the evening, and Boadicea had to sit in the sweaty embrace of her earphones, listening to the interminable sound track of *Toora-Loora Turandot,* a weary old Irish musical that Mrs. Reade had taken upstairs from the library. The minutes crept by, and the music poked along, and then at last Grandison knocked and could be heard to enter and to say: "Enough is enough, Bobo, and this, surely, is too much."

"Darling?" said the voice of Mrs. Reade.

"A moment, my love. I have one thing more to say to my daughter, who is eavesdropping on us at this moment, while pretending to study her French. *You* are to be finished, Bobo. In Switzerland, at a very highly recommended finishing school in Vilars. I've already informed the principal at Amesville that you'll be going abroad. To learn, I sincerely hope, better manners than you've shown evidence of these last few months. You're to leave at six in the morning. So let me say now, by way of parting, shame on you, Bobo, and *bon voyage!*"

"Good-by, Miss Whiting," said Mrs. Reade. "When you're in Switzerland you must look up my niece Patricia. I'll send you her address." At that point the microphone was disconnected.

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All during the drive from Des Moines — and they were now, a sign announced, only twenty-two miles from Amesville — Boadicea had been too upset to talk. She hadn't meant to be rude to Carl Mueller, though it must have seemed like rudeness. It was anger, raw white anger that would return in surges of never-diminishing intensity and then, for a while, recede, leaving behind, like the wastes of oil and tar on a seaport's beach, the blackest of black depressions, a horror-stricken sorrow during which she would be assaulted by images of violent self-immolation — of the Saab crashing into a power pylon and bursting into flames, of opened veins, shotgun blasts, and other spectacular annihilations, images she rather entertained than resisted, since to have such monstrous thoughts was in itself a kind of revenge. And then, suddenly, irresistibly, the anger would return, so that she would have to press her eyes closed and clench her fists to keep from being overcome.

Yet she knew all the while that such transports were ridiculous and uncalled-for and that she was, in some sense, indulging herself. Her father, in sending Carl Mueller to the airport, had meant no slight, still less a chastisement. He had planned to come for her himself, his note had said, until this very morning when a business crisis had required him to go to Chicago. Similar crises had brought similar disappointments before, though never so passionate nor so unremitting as this. She really must calm down. If she re-

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turned to Worry in this state, she was certain to betray herself before Serjeant or Alethea. Just the thought of them, the mention of their names in her mind, could start her off again. Two years she'd been away, and they had sent a stranger to welcome her home. It was not to be believed, it could never be forgiven.

"Carl?"

"Miss Whiting?" He did not take his eyes from the road.

"I expect you'll think this is silly, but I wonder if you could take me anywhere else but to Worry. The nearer we get, and we're *so* near now, the more unable I feel to cope."

"I'll go where you like, Miss Whiting, but there aren't all that many places to go."

"A restaurant, somewhere *away* from Amesville? You haven't had dinner, have you?"

"No, Miss Whiting. But your folks will be expecting you."

"My father's in Chicago, and as to my brother and sister, I doubt that either of them has gone to any *personal* expense of energy on account of my arrival. I'll simply phone and say that I stopped in Des Moines to do some shopping — it's what Alethea would do — and that I'm not equal to driving on to Amesville till I've had dinner. Do you mind?"

"Whatever you say, Miss Whiting. I could do with a bite to eat, I guess."

She studied his blunt profile in silence, marveling at his impassivity, the quiet fixity of his driving, which could not, on these monotonous roads, *require* such unwavering attention.

As they approached a cloverleaf, he slowed, and asked, still without looking at her: "Somewhere quiet? There's a pretty good Vietnamese restaurant over in Bewley. At least, that's what they say."

"I think, actually, I'd *prefer* somewhere noisy. And a steak. I'm starved for the taste of rare Midwestern beef."

He did, then, turn to look at her. His cheek dimpled with the inception of a smile, but whether it was a friendly smile, or only ironic, she couldn't tell, for his sunglasses masked his eyes. In any case, they were not, she would have supposed, especially candid eyes.

"Aren't there places people go," she insisted, "up by the border? Especially on Saturday nights. This *is* Saturday night."

"You need an ID," he said.

She took out a plastic packet of cards and handed them to Carl Mueller. There was a Social Security card, a driver's license, a Reader's Digest Subscription Library card, an Iowa Women's Defense League registration card, a card declaring her to be a tithing member of the Holy Blood Pentecostal Mission Church (with a laminated photo), and assorted charge cards, all of them identifying her as Beverley Whittaker, age 22, of 512 Willow Street, Mason City, Iowa.

The Elmore Roller-Rink Roadhouse combined wholesomeness and elegance in a manner archetypally Midwestern. Under a glowing greenhouse ceiling, lattices of pipes supported an aerial meadow of herbs and houseplants in hanging pots and tiers of ter-

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ra cotta planters. Beneath the greenery a great many antique kitchen tables of oak and pine (all tagged for sale, as were the plants) were grouped about an implausibly large dance floor. It really had been, long ago, a roller rink. Two couples were out on the floor dancing, with lively unspectacular competence, to the Chocolate Doughnut Polka. It was only seven o'clock: everyone else was eating dinner.

The food was wonderful. Boadicea had explained the exact nature of its superiority to anything they might have eaten in Switzerland, had explained it into the ground. Now, with dessert still to be chosen, she had to think of something else for them to talk about, since Carl seemed perfectly prepared to sit there and say nothing. Even with his sunglasses off, his face was unreadable, though handsome enough, considered simple as sculpture: the broad brow and blunt nose, the massive muscles of the neck tapering into the simple geometries of his crew-cut, the emphatic carving of the lips, nostrils, and eyes, which yet, for all their distinctness, yielded no meanings of a psychological order. If he smiled, it was that mechanical sort of smile that suggested gears and pulleys. Clank, screek, snik, and then a little card emerges from the metal slot with the word SMILE on it. Sitting there, facing him across the little spray of bachelor buttons and petunias, she tried it herself — tightening the corner of her lips, and lifting them, notch by notch. But then, before he'd noticed, the pendulum swung back and she felt the sting of guilt. What right had she to expect Carl Mueller to be forthcoming with her? She was nothing to him but the boss's daughter, and she'd taken every mean advantage of that position, commandeering his company as though he had no life or feelings of his own. And then *blaming* him!

"I'm sorry," she said, with an utter sincerity of contrition.

Carl crinkled his brow. "For what?"

"For dragging you off like this. For taking up your time. I mean —" She pressed her fingers to the sides of her head just above the cheekbones, where the flux of various miseries was beginning to take the form of a monster headache. "I mean, I didn't *ask*, did I, whether you had other plans for this evening?"

He produced one of his clockwork smiles. "That's okay, Miss Whiting. I didn't exactly plan on coming here to Elmore tonight, but what the hell. Like you say, the food's great. You worried about your folks?"

"My feelings are pretty much the opposite of worry. I'm thoroughly pissed off with *all* of them."

"That's what I'd gathered. Of course, it's none of my business, but I can say for a fact that your father didn't have much choice whether or not to go to Chicago."

"Oh, yes, I learned long ago that business is business. And I don't — I *can't* — blame him. But Serjeant could have come. He *is* my brother."

"I didn't mention it before, Miss Whiting —"

"Beverley," she corrected. Earlier she'd made a game of making him call

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her by the name on her false ID.

"I didn't mention it before, Miss Whiting, because it didn't seem my place to, but the reason your brother couldn't come for you is that two weeks ago he got his license suspended for drunk driving. He was driving home from Elmore."

"He could have come along with you then. So could Alethea."

"Maybe they could. But I don't think either of them cares that much for my company. Not that they've got any kind of grudge against me. But after all, I'm just one of the operations managers, not a friend of the family." With which — and with, it seemed, no sense at all of its being a questionable act — he poured the last of the wine in the carafe into his own glass.

"If you want to take me home now, that's all right."

"Just relax, Miss Whiting."

"Beverley."

"Okay, Beverley."

"There actually is a real Beverley Whittaker. She was in Switzerland, hiking. We met in a hospice about halfway up Mont Blanc. There was the most *incredible* lightning storm. Once you've seen lightning in the mountains, you can understand why the Greeks put their most important god in charge of it."

Carl nodded gloomily.

She had to stop chattering, but the long silences, when they developed, panicked her equally.

Another couple had gone out on the dance floor, but just as they started dancing, the music stopped. The silence enlarged.

She had a rule of thumb for such situations, and it was to take an interest in other people, since that was what *they* were interested in.

"And, uh, what are *you* in charge of?" she asked.

"Pardon?" But his eyes connected just long enough to let her see that he'd understood — and resented — the question.

Which, nevertheless, she must repeat. "You said you were an operations manager. Which operation do you manage?"

"Whatever has to do with the work crews. Recruitment and housing primarily. Transport, payroll, supervision."

"Oh."

"It's a job that has to be done."

"Of course. My father says it's the most important operation on the farm."

"That's a way of saying it's the dirtiest. Which it is."

"Well, it's not what I meant. In fact, I *wouldn't* say that."

"You would if you had to deal with some of the types we end up with. In another month or so, at the height of it, we'll have something like twelve hundred on the payroll, and of that twelve hundred I'd say a good half of them are no better than animals."

"I'm sorry, Carl, but I just can't accept that."

"Well, there's no reason you should have to, Miss Whiting." He smiled. "Beverley, that is. Anyway, it's a good job, and a hell of a lot of responsibility for someone my age; so it would be crazy to complain, if that's

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what it seems like I'm doing. It's not."

They were rescued by the waitress who came and asked them what they wanted for dessert. Carl asked for bavarian cream. Boadicea, because it was her first meal back in America, ordered apple pie.

A new polka had started up, and Boadicea, admitting defeat, turned her chair sideways to watch the dancers. There was a couple out on the floor now who actually could dance, whose bodies moved with the motions of life. They made the other dancers look like the simulacra you paid to see inside a tent at a county fair. The girl was especially good. She wore a wide, whirling, gypsyish skirt with a flounce at the hem, and the sway and flare and swirl of the skirt seemed to enfuse the bland music with energies of an altogether higher order. The boy danced with equal energy but less panache. His limbs moved too abruptly, while his torso seemed never quite to unlock from its innate crouch. It was the body of a Breughel peasant. Even so, the delight in his face was so lively, and it was such a handsome face (not in the least a Breughel), that you couldn't keep from feeling an answering delight. The girl (Boadicea was sure) wouldn't have danced nearly so well with someone else, would not have been so set-on-fire. Together, for as long as the polka lasted, they brought time to a stop at the Elmore Roller-Rink Roadhouse.

Among the traditions and institutions of Amesville High School, Mrs. Norberg of Room 113 was one of the most awful — in, as Boadicea liked to say, the original sense of the word. Some years before, in a tight three-way contest, she had been elected to the House of Representatives on the ticket of the American Spiritual Renewal Party. In its heyday the A.S.R.P. had been the rallying point of the Farm Belt's most diehard Undergoders, but as their first fine vision of a spiritually awakened America faded, and especially when the party's leaders were proven to be as venal as run-of-the-mill Republicans and Democrats, its members returned to the G.O.P. or became, like Mrs. Norberg, lone voices crying in a wilderness of political error.

Mrs. Norberg had taught American History and Senior Social Studies at the time of her election, and when she returned to Iowa after her single term in Washington, she taught the same subjects, and she was teaching them still, though recently she had added to the stature of her legend by having spent a two years' so-called sabbatical in a rest home in Dubuque, where she was taken (much against her will) after having been inspired one day to cut off a student's hair in the school lunchroom. Her students referred to this as the Iceberg's second term of office. They knew she was crazy, but no one seemed to mind all that much. Since Dubuque, her frenzies against gum chewers and note passers were much abated, and she limited herself to a teacher's conventional weapon, the report card. On an average, twenty per cent of each year's graduating class failed Social Studies and had to take a make-up class to get their diplomas.

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All her known enemies were failed, of course, but so might be, it seemed, anyone else. Her F's fell, like the rain, on the just and unjust alike. Some even claimed that Mrs. Norberg drew names out of a hat.

This would have been alarming enough with regard only to its gross injustice, but Boadicea had a special reason to dread the Iceberg's class, in that it had been her Uncle Charles who had taken away Mrs. Norberg's seat in the house. When she had expressed her misgivings to her father, he was dismissive. A majority of the people one had to deal with, Grandison declared, were lunatics. One of the chief reasons for Boadicea's attending a public high school was precisely that she might come to terms with this unpleasant truth. As to the possibility of failing, she need not worry: Grandison had already arranged with the principal to correct any grade she received that was less than a B. All she had to do, therefore, was go to Room 113 for one hour every day and sit. She might be as reticent or as outspoken as she chose — it wouldn't matter. But as to getting rid of Mrs. Norberg, that was not to be thought of. Incompetent she might be, or even bananas, but she was also the last certified Undergoder on the high school's faculty, and any attempt to dislodge her would have raised a major stink throughout the county and possibly across the state. In three years she would retire: till then she had to be endured.

Given such guarantees — a virtual suit of armor — Boadicea soon became the official gadfly of her class. Mrs. Norberg seemed rather more grateful than not to be supplied with a combatant who could be relied on to hold — and express — opinions that she would otherwise have been obliged to set forth herself before she could trounce them, never a very satisfactory arrangement for someone who delights in controversy. That these aberrant ideas possessed much more force and cogency as expressed by Boadicea than by the Iceberg's usual straw men seemed not to trouble her. Like most people of strong convictions, any contradiction registered on her consciousness as so much nonsense. Faith is a selective kind of blindness.

So it was that whenever Boadicea would be holding forth on any subject, from the reasonableness of a graduated income tax to the need for new federal water-purity standards, a fixed smile would settle on the Iceberg's colorless lips, her eyes would glaze, and she would knit her fingers together in a thorny little clump of self-restraint, as who would say: "Though my duty be painful, I shall perform it to the last drop of my blood." When Boadicea wound down, Mrs. Norberg would unclasp her hands, give a little sigh, and thank Boadicea ironically for what she was sure was a "very interesting" or "very unusual" point of view. If this seemed insufficiently withering, she would ask others in the class what their thoughts on the matter were, calling first on anyone she suspected to be a fellow traveler. Most students, prudently, refused to be trapped into any opinion, pro or con, but there was a small contingent, eight of the thirty-

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two, who could be relied on to parrot Mrs. Norberg's established prejudices, however silly, however blatantly contrary to fact. It was always one of these who was allowed to have the last word, a strategy that had the desired effect of making Boadicea seem, even to herself, a minority of one. Also, it tended to diffuse her animosity and deflect it toward the eight reliables, whose names became a kind of baleful litany for her: Cheryl and Mitch and Reuben and Sloan, and Sandra and Susan and Judy and Joan. All the girls, except Sandra Wolf, were cheerleaders, and all, without exception, were mindless. Three of the eight — Joan Small and Cheryl and Mitch Severson — came from the wealthier farm families of the area. The Seversons and Smalls were scarcely comparable to the Whitings, but they did qualify as "gentry" and were invited as a matter of course to all the larger functions at Worry. It distressed Boadicea to find herself at odds with three of the people she was expected to be on friendly, or at least neighborly, terms with, but she couldn't help herself. There was no *need* for them to suck up to Mrs. Norberg so egregiously. Their parents weren't Undergoders, not in the benighted way *they* were. Fanaticism on the scale of the A.S.R.P. was a relic of the past. So why did they do it? Assuming they weren't just bootlicking. And for that matter, how did you explain someone like the Iceberg herself? Why were people like that so bent on patrolling people's most private *thoughts?* For that's all the old Undergoder dread of music (etc.) amounted to. They couldn't bear for other people to have experiences *they* were incapable of. Resentment. Resentment and jealousy — it was as simple as that, though no one (not even Boadicea) dared to come right out and say so.

Like most well-seasoned teachers, Mrs. Norberg was a confirmed monologist, and so Boadicea was not called upon every day to speak up for reason and sanity. Penance enough to have to be an audience to the Iceberg's rambling reminiscences of her term in Congress (it was her special pride and unique distinction to have been present at every vote taken in those two years). These would shift, by the freest of associations, into (for instance) a cutesy-poo anecdote about the dear sweet squirrels in her back yard — Silverface, Tom-Boy, and Mittens, each of them a little philosopher in the rough — and these whimsies would metamorphose, by imperceptible degrees, into diatribes against the F.D.A., the *bête noir* of the Farm Belt. All this — the memorabilia, the whimsies, the denunciations — would be set forth with an air of winking complicity, for it was the Iceberg's underlying assumption that her students were sensible to their good fortune in having been assigned to her Social Studies class.

Listening to these monologues and battering her wits against the woman's impassive, impervious authority, Boadicea came to hate Mrs. Norberg with a hatred that would leave her, by the hour's end, trembling with impotent fury. Literally trembling. Sheerly from a sense of self-preservation, she took to cutting classes, even though there

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was no way, with the bus drivers posted at the doors, to leave the building. She would lock herself inside a toilet and sit cross-legged on the stool, working calculus problems. She became openly sarcastic in class and sneered when she was sneered at. She made a point, whenever a soliloquy commenced, of turning away from the Iceberg and staring out the window, though there was nothing to be seen but sky and clouds and the slow curve of three suspended wires. Mrs. Norberg made no other response to these provocations than to move Boadicea to the front row, where, if Boadicea chose to divert her gaze, she would simply interpose herself between the viewer and the view.

It was there, in the front row seat next to his, that Boadicea recognized Daniel Weinreb. They had been together in the class for two months without her making the connection. Not that the back of his head (which was mostly all she'd seen of him till the move to the front) was so very distinctive. Also, he'd changed his appearance since she'd fallen, briefly and platonically, in love with him at the Elmore Roller-Rink Roadhouse: shorter hair, the mustache gone, the high spirits folded away, and an inert, affectless fortitude in their place. Except to answer the roll call or shuffle his feet at a question directly addressed to him, he never spoke in class, and just as his words never betrayed his thoughts, his face never betrayed his feelings.

Boadicea was certain, however, that they were not greatly unlike her own. He hated the Iceberg as fervently as she did; he must — or how could he dance so well? Perhaps as a syllogism this left something to be desired, and Boadicea didn't rest content with an *a priori* conviction. She began to collect evidences — glints and flashes of the suspected smoldering fires.

The first thing she discovered was that she was not alone in studying Daniel so closely. Mrs. Norberg herself demonstrated a curiosity altogether out of proportion to Daniel's classroom contributions. Often when another student would be speaking, her eyes would turn to Daniel, and at the militant moment when she would cut loose from classroom protocols and really *testify* for the gospel of the A.S.R.P., it was toward Daniel these goads were directed, despite that it would be Boadicea, if anyone, who would rise to the bait and argue.

At last, however, toward the end of the second six-week period, Mrs. Norberg threw out a challenge that Daniel did not turn away from. There had been a story in the news, recently, that had very much exercised the indignation of Undergoders. Bud Scully, a farm manager for a Northrup Corp. farm outside LaVerne, had undertaken, on his own initiative, to do what it was no longer permitted the State of Iowa to do: he'd been jamming radio broadcasts originating in Minnesota. The stations had brought suit against him, and he was enjoined to desist. When he refused, on grounds of conscience, and continued his private crusade, he was sent to prison. Undergoders were up in arms. Mrs. Norberg,

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who, to do her credit, tried to resist the passions of the passing hour (she never, for instance, went beyond Watergate in her American History class) was swept away. She devoted a week of the class's time to an in-depth consideration of John Brown. She read aloud Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. She played a recording of the hymn of "John Brown's Body," standing over the tape recorder warily and jerking her head up and down in time to the music. When the hymn was over, with tears in her eyes (a quite inadvertent testimony to the power of music), she told how she had visited the park right here in Iowa where John Brown had drilled his volunteer army for the attack on Harper's Ferry. Then, shouldering her blackboard pointer like a rifle, she showed the class how the soldiers in that army would have drilled, marching back and forth across the shining maple floorboards — right face, left face, ten-SHUN! to the rear MARCH, a perfect spectacle. At such moments, truly, you'd have had to have a heart of stone not to be grateful to be in the Iceberg's class.

All this while, she had resisted mentioning Bud Scully by name, though none of them could have been unaware of the intended parallel. Now, after a formal salute to the flag in the corner, Mrs. Norberg abandoned all pretense of objectivity. She went to the blackboard and wrote out, in gigantic letters, the martyr's name: BUD SCULLY. Then she went to her desk, secured herself behind her folded hands, and, glowering, defied the world to do its worst.

Boadicea raised her hand.

Mrs. Norberg called on her.

"Do you mean," Boadicea asked, with a disingenuous smile, "that Bud Scully is another John Brown? And that what he did was right?"

"Did I *say* that?" the Iceberg demanded. "Let me ask *you,* Miss Whiting: is that your opinion? *Is* Bud Scully's case analagous to that of John Brown?"

"In the sense that he's gone to jail for his convictions, you might say so. But otherwise? One man tried to stop slavery, and the other is trying to stop popular music radio stations. At least that's what I understand from the newspaper."

"Which newspaper would that be? I ask, you see, because I gave up reading the papers some time ago. My experiences (especially when I was on the Hill) have shown me that they're not at all reliable."

"It was the *Star-Tribune.*"

"The *Star-Tribune,*" the Iceberg repeated, turning to Daniel with a knowing look.

"And what it said," Boadicea continued, "in its editorial, was that everyone must obey the law just because it *is* the law, and the only way we're ever going to live together peacefully is to respect the law. Even when it grates against us."

"That seems quite sound on the face of it. The question John Brown poses, though, remains to be answered. Are we required to obey an unjust law?" The Iceberg threw back her head, glittering with righteousness.

Boadicea persisted. "According to

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the polls, *most* people thought the *old* law was unjust, the law that kept them from reading out-of-state newspapers and from listening to out-of-state broadcasts."

"According," Mrs. Norberg said scornfully, "to the polls in those same newspapers."

"Well, the Supreme Court felt it was unjust too, or they wouldn't have overturned it. And as I understand it, short of a constitutional amendment, the Supreme Court has the last word on the rightness or the wrongness of laws."

Mrs. Norberg's views on the Supreme Court were well known, and accordingly there was a tacit understanding among her students to steer clear of the reefs of this subject. But Boadicea was beyond compassion or prudence. She wanted to demolish the woman's mind and send her back to Dubuque in a strait-jacket. She deserved nothing else.

It wasn't going to be that easy, however. Mrs. Norberg had a paranoid's instinct for knowing when she was being persecuted. She stepped aside and Boadicea's missile passed by harmlessly.

"It is a knotty question, I agree. And highly complex. Everyone will be affected by it in a different way, and that is bound to color our attitudes. Right here in this room we have someone whose life was touched very directly by the decision Miss Whiting speaks of. Daniel, what is *your* opinion?"

"About what?" Daniel asked.

"Does the State of Iowa have the right, the sovereign right, to bar potentially harmful and disruptive material from being publicly available, or does that represent an interference with our constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech?"

"I can't say I ever thought much about it."

"Surely, Daniel, having gone to prison for breaking the state's law...." She paused for the benefit of anyone in the class who might not have known this. Of course there was no one who hadn't heard Daniel's legend by now. It was nearly of the magnitude of Mrs. Norberg's, which probably, more than the principles involved, accounted for her relentless, attentive dislike. "Surely, when you're then released because the Supreme Court —" She lifted her eyebrows sardonically. "— rules, that, after all, the law is *not* the law and never has been ... *surely,* you must have some opinion on such a subject."

"I guess my opinion is that it doesn't make much difference one way or the other."

"Not make much difference! A change that big?"

"I got out two weeks earlier, and that's about it."

"Really, Daniel, I don't know what you can mean."

"I mean I still don't think it's safe to express an honest opinion anywhere in the state of Iowa. And so far as I know, there's no law that says I *have* to. *And* I'm not about to."

First there was a silence. Then, led by Boadicea, a smattering of applause. Even with that unprecedented provocation, Mrs. Norberg did not take her eyes from Daniel. You could almost

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see the calculations going on behind that fixed stare: was his insolence defensible, in theory, as candor? Or might he be made to pay for it? Nothing less than expulsion would be worth a head-on contest, and at last, with evident reluctance, she decided not to risk it. There would always be another time.

After the class Boadicea lay in wait for Daniel at the entrance to the lunchroom.

"That was terrific," she told him in a stage whisper, as she slipped into place behind him in the cafeteria line. "A regular adventure movie."

"It was a mistake."

"Oh, no! You were completely, universally right. The only way to deal with the Iceberg is silence. Let her talk to her eight echoes."

He just smiled. Not the fleshly, unforgetable smile of the Elmore Roller-Rink Roadhouse, but a smile that was all mind and meaning. She felt abashed, as though, by making no reply, he meant to show that he considered her one of the people it wasn't safe to talk to. The smile faltered.

"Hey," he said, "this is a dumb argument — you telling me I'm right, and me saying I'm wrong."

"Well, you *are* right."

"Maybe, but what's right for me isn't necessarily what's right for you. If *you* stop sniping at her, what'll there be for the rest of us to listen to?"

"You mean I can afford to be brave because I'm safe."

"And I can't afford it. Which wasn't something I should have spelled out. *That's* the mistake. One of the first things you learn in prison is that the guards like to think that you *like* them. Norberg's no different."

Boadicea wanted to wrap her arms around him, to leap up and cheer for him like some silly cheerleader, to buy him something terrifically expensive and appropriate, such was the enormity of her agreement and of her gratitude at having anyone to be agreeing with.

"School *is* a prison," she agreed earnestly. "You know, I used to think I was the only person in the world who understood that. I was in Switzerland at this awful so-called finishing school, and I wrote a letter home, to my father, explaining all the ways it was a prison, and *he* wrote back saying, 'Of course, my dear Bobo — school is a prison for the very good reason that all children are criminals.'"

"Uh-huh."

They'd reached the food. Daniel took a dish of coleslaw onto his tray and pointed at the fishsticks.

"Actually," she went on, "that isn't exactly what he said. What he said was that teen-agers aren't fully civilized yet, and so they're dangerous. Not here in Iowa, perhaps, but in the cities certainly. But one of the differences between here and the cities ... oh, just soup for me, please ... is the degree to which people here *do* live by the official code. That's what my father says anyhow.

"Daniel?"

He stopped and she asked, with her eyes, for him to wait till they were out of earshot of the check-out girl. When

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they were, she asked him, "Are you having lunch with anyone else today?"

"No."

"Why not have lunch with me then? I know it's not for me to ask, and you probably prefer to have the time to yourself, to think." She paused to allow him to contradict her, but he just stood there with his devastating superior smile. His handsomeness was so dark, so exotic, almost as though he belonged to another race. "But me," she persisted, "I'm different. I like to talk before I think."

He laughed. "Say, I've got an idea," he said. "Why don't *you* have lunch with *me?*"

"Why how nice of you to ask, Daniel," she minced, her parody of pert insouciance. Or possibly it was the genuine article, pert insouciance itself. "Or should I call you Mr. Weinreb?"

"Maybe something in between."

"Very funny." Making her voice comically deep.

"That's what Susan McCarthy always says when she's at a loss for words."

"I know. I'm a close observer. Too." But, for all that, it had stung — to be compared (and accurately) with the likes of a Susan McCarthy.

They'd found bench space at a relatively quiet table. Instead of starting to eat, he just looked at her. Started to say something, and stopped. She felt tingly with excitement. She had caught his attention. It stopped short of liking or even, in any committed way, of interest, but the worst was over, and suddenly, incredibly, she couldn't think of anything else to say. She blushed. She smiled. And shook her head, with pert insouciance.

After the argument with her hateful — literally hateful — sister, Boadicea wrapped herself in her old school cape of green loden and went up to the roof, where the wind whipped her hair and walloped the cape with satisfying emphasis. The twit, she thought, concerning Alethea, the prig, the bitch, the sneak, the spy, the snob; the sly, mindless, soulless, self-regarding slut. The worse of it was that Boadicea could never, when it came to a showdown, translate her scorn into language that Alethea would admit to understanding, whereas Alethea had a monolithic confidence in her snobberies that gave even her most banal gibes a kind of authority.

Even the roof wasn't far enough. With grim elation Boadicea mounted the west wind-pylon, pausing in the lee of the first vane to marvel, dispassionately, that there could be enough heat left in these wintry blasts to be converted into the steady whirling of the metal blades. *Was* it heat? Or just the momentum of the molecules of gas? Or was there any difference? In any case, science was wonderful.

So forget Alethea, she told herself. Rise above her. Consider the clouds and determine the actual colors incorporated in their mottled, luminous, numinous gray. Arrange the world so that *her* intolerable sneering profile was not in the foreground, and then it would become, perhaps, a satisfactory sort of world, large and bright and full of admirable processes that a clear

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mind could learn to deal with, the way the pylons dealt with the wind, the way her father dealt with people, even such otherwise, intractable people as Alethea and, occasionally, herself.

Higher she mounted, above the highest vanes, to the small eyrie of steel hoops at the top of the pylon. The winds buffeted. The platform swayed. But she felt no vertigo, only the steadying satisfaction of seeing the world spread out in so orderly a way. The great jumble of Worry became, from this height, as comprehensible as a set of blueprints: the fallow flowerbeds and quincunxes of small trees in the Whitings' private gardens on the roof below; then, stepwise in terraces below these, on the more extensive rooftops of the wings, were the pools and playgrounds of the other residents of the complex; farthest down, bounded by a broad defensive crescent of garages, stables, and silos, were the kitchen gardens, poultry yards, and tennis courts. The few people in sight all seemed to be engaged in emblematic tasks, like figures in a Breughel: children skating, a woman scattering corn for chickens, two blue-jacketed mechanics bent over the idling engine of a limousine, a man walking a dog toward the trees that screened the western gatehouse. To one who stood on the roof those trees would mark the limit of the horizon, but from this higher vantage one could see over them as far as the blue-gray zigzag of housetops that had once been — and not so long ago that Boadicea couldn't remember it herself — the village of Unity. Most of the village's former residents lived in Worry now. Their clapboard houses stood empty through most of the year, as many as still stood at all. It was saddening to think that a whole way of life, a century of traditions, had to come to an end for the new way to begin. But what was the alternative? To keep it going artificially, an instant Williamsburg? In effect that was what the summer people were doing now, at least with the better homes. The rest had been scavenged for their meat — siding, plumbing, curious bits of carpentry — and the bones left to weather into a more picturesque condition, at which point, doubtless, they would go to the auction block too. It was sad to see, but it was necessary — the result of forces too large to be withstood, though they might be channeled and shaped with more or less love and imagination. Worry, with its neo-Norman castellations, its outlying parks and commons, surely represented the process of feudalization at its most humane and, so to speak, democratic. A utopia of sorts. Whether, finally, it were a utopia for the likes of Boadicea she could never decide. Ownership of so much land and wealth was problematical enough, but beyond this was the moral question of one's relation with one's tenants. There were over five hundred at last count. Though *they* would all have denied it — and could in fact be seen denying it in the movie Boadicea had made way back when — their condition was uncomfortably close to serfdom. But uncomfortable, it seemed, only for Boadicea, since the waiting list of qualified applicants who wanted to sign on and move in was ridiculously in

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excess of the foreseeable openings. Kids at school were always sounding her out about their chances of being moved to the top of the list; some had offered outright bribes if she would put in a word with her father. Once poor Serjeant had got into hot water for accepting such a bribe.

But to suppose that Daniel Weinreb had so venal a purpose in cultivating her acquaintance was a patent absurdity. The accusation revealed the limits of Alethea's imagination, for it couldn't begin to do justice to the scale of Daniel's ambitions. Daniel meant to be an artist, as great an artist as he could become. Boadicea doubted whether he'd given so much as a moment's thought to the long-term possibilities of their friendship. Aside from the opportunity (which he was finally to take up today) of paying a visit to Worry and trying his hand at the Whitings' various instruments, it was unlikely that he considered the acquaintance especially advantageous. Except for the chance (the glorious chance) to talk with someone else who also meant to become a great artist. So, really, he didn't seem to have, in a word, designs.

Boadicea, by contrast, lived most of her life in an endless design. Every moment she wasn't entirely focused on the task in hand, she was planning, rehearsing, imagining, daydreaming. What she had planned, vis-a-vis, Daniel, was that they would be lovers. She had not drawn up a detailed scenario of how it would come about. She wasn't even entirely sure of the details of their love's consummation, since such pornography as she'd looked into had seemed rather ishy, but she was certain that once they'd actually got involved erotically it would be very nice, not to say ecstatic. Daniel, she'd heard tell from various independent sources, had been "intimate" with a number of women (one of them six years older than he and engaged to another man), though no one was prepared to say whether he'd definitely gone all the way. Sex, therefore, could be trusted to take care of itself (at least in her daydreams), and Boadicea was free to elaborate the associated drama: how, quite suddenly, on a whim or a dare or after a fight with her sister, she would run off with Daniel to some sinister, faraway capital — Paris or Rome or Toronto — there to lead a life that would be thrilling, elegant, virtuous, simple, and entirely devoted to art in its highest manifestations. Not, however, till they'd graduated, for even in her wildest dreams Boadicea proceeded with caution.

A mile beyond Unity the road climbed a short rise, and you could see, for the first time, the gray ferro-concrete tower of Worry. Then the road dipped and the tower sank back into featureless fields.

He was short of breath and his legs were aching from pedaling too fast; but being so near, it was psychologically impossible to slow down. Even the wind, gusting from the west and puffing up his windbreaker before him like a small red sail, seemed to be trying to speed him on his way. He turned right at the unmarked turn-off that everyone knew was the road to Worry,

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zipped past a man out walking a German shepherd, and arrived out-of-breath at the gatehouse.

A metal gate sprang up from the road in front of him, a hooter began hooting, stopped just long enough for a recorded voice to tell him to get out of his car, and started up again. A uniformed guard came out of the gatehouse holding a submachine gun. It would have been disconcerting anywhere else, but Daniel, never having been to Worry before, supposed this was the standard reception that unannounced visitors received.

He reached into his jacket pocket for the invitation disk that Boadicea had given him, but the guard shouted that he should put his hands above his head.

He put his hands above his head.

"Where do you think you're going, son?" the guard asked.

"I'm visiting Miss Whiting. At her invitation. The disk she gave me is in my pocket."

The guard reached into Daniel's pocket and took out the disk.

Daniel lowered his hands. The guard seemed to consider whether to take offense. Instead he went into the gatehouse with the disk, and for five minutes Daniel saw no more of him. Finally he set his bike on its kickstand and went to the door of the gatehouse. Through the glass he could see the guard talking on the phone. The guard gestured for him to go back to his bike.

"Is something wrong?" Daniel shouted through the glass.

The guard opened the door and handed the phone to Daniel with a peculiar kind of smile. "Here, he wants to talk to you."

"Hello," Daniel said into the grille of the mouthpiece.

"Hello," replied a pleasant, purring baritone. "There seems to be a problem. I assume this is Daniel Weinreb that I'm speaking to."

"This is Daniel Weinreb, yes."

"The problem is this, Daniel. Our security system insists on identifying you as, probably, an escaped prisoner. The guard is understandably reluctant to admit you. In fact, under the circumstances, he hasn't the authority to do so."

"Well, I'm *not* an escaped prisoner. So that should solve your problem."

"But it doesn't explain why the security system, which is preternaturally sensitive, should continue to declare that you are carrying a Poole-Williams lozenge of the type used by the state's prison system."

"Not the lozenge. Just the housing for it."

"Ah-ha. Our system isn't up to making such nice distinctions, apparently. It's none of my business, of course, but don't you think it would be wiser — or at least more convenient — to have it taken out? Then this sort of confusion wouldn't happen."

"You're right — it is none of your business. Now, would you please buzz me in, or do I have to have surgery first?"

"By all means. Let me speak to the guard again, would you?"

Daniel handed the phone to the guard and went back to his bicycle. As

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soon as he came nearer the gatehouse, the hooter started in again, but this time it was switched off.

The guard came out of the gatehouse and said, "Okay. Just go down the road. The Whitings' entrance is the one with the wrought-iron gates. There's another guard there, but he's expecting you."

Daniel nodded, smug with small triumph.

Alethea, at the base of the wind pylon, signaled with her scarf to Boadicea on the summit. Since their quarrel Alethea had put on a riding habit and looked more than ever the *belle dame sans merci.*

Boadicea waved back. She didn't want to come down, but Alethea must have had some reason for being so persistent, and anyway she *did* want to come down since her face and her fingers were numb with cold. The wind and the view had served the simultaneous purpose of calming her down and lifting her up. She could return to earth and talk to Alethea in a spirit of no more than sisterly combativeness.

"I thought," said Alethea, disdaining to shout but waiting until Boadicea was quite close by, "that your story of having invited that boy here was a complete fabrication. But he's come, on his bicycle, and there seems to be some question whether he's to be allowed through the gate. I thought you should know."

Boadicea was taken aback. Alethea's action too much resembled ordinary courtesy for her to take exception to it. "Thank you," she had to say, and Alethea smiled.

"I *gave* him a disk," Boadicea fretted.

"They must have thought he looked suspicious. He does to me."

Inside the stairwell, on the next landing down, was a phone. Boadicea dialed the gatehouse. The guard said that Daniel had already gone through, on her father's say-so.

Alethea was waiting for her by the elevator. "Seriously, Bobo...."

"Didn't you say, less than an hour ago, that my biggest problem was that I was always *too* serious?"

"Yes, of course, but seriously: what can you see in this Weinreb boy? Is it because he was in prison? Do you think that's *glamorous?*"

"That has precisely nothing to do with it."

"I'll allow he has tolerable good looks —"

Boadicea raised her eyebrows challengingly. Daniel's looks deserved more than a five on anyone's scale of ten.

"— but, after all, he does represent the lower depths, doesn't he?"

"His father's a dentist."

"And, from what I've heard, not even a particularly good one."

"From whom did you hear that?"

"I forget. In any case, good or bad: a dentist! Isn't that enough? Didn't you learn anything in Switzerland?"

"Indeed I did. I learned to value intelligence, taste, and breeding — the qualities I admire in Daniel."

"Breeding!"

"Yes, breeding. Don't provoke me to comparisons."

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The elevator arrived. They had captured one of the maids, who'd been trying to go down to the kitchen on 2. They rode down in silence until she got off. Boadicea pressed G.

Alethea sighed. "I think you're being very foolish. And, come the day that you finally do drop him, very cruel."

"Who is to say, Alethea, that that day will ever come?"

She'd said it only to be provoking, but hearing the words spoken, she wondered if they might conceivably be true. Was this the beginning of her real life? (As against the provisional life she'd been leading up to now.)

"Oh, Bobo. *Really!*"

"Why not?" Boadicea demanded, a trifle too emphatically. "If we're in love."

Alethea giggled, with complete sincerity. And shook her head, by way of saying good-by, and set off down the hall in the other direction, toward the stables.

It was, Boadicea had to admit, an enormous if. She loved talking with Daniel, she loved looking at him, for he had the sort of features that bear contemplation. But love? Love, in the sense commemorated by centuries of books and operas and films?

Once, when she'd followed him about on his paper route, they had sat snuggling together in a broken-down car in a dark garage. It had seemed, for those fifteen minutes, the supreme happiness of her life. To be warm. To relax in that utter anonymity. To savor the silences and smells of a stranger's garage — rust, dry leaves, the ghosts of ancient motor oils. They'd talked in a dreamy way of going back to the golden age of V-8 engines and superhighways and being two totally average teenagers in a movie about growing up. A lovely pastoral moment, certainly, but scarcely proof of their being in love.

She wondered if Daniel ever wondered whether they were in love or whether they would be, some day. She wondered if she could get up the nerve to ask him and what he would say if she did, for he could hardly come right out and say no, the thought had never crossed his mind. While she was still in the midst of her wonderings, there he was, with his bicycle, on the raked gravel of the crescent. The first snowflakes of the year were alighting on his beautiful black hair. His nose and forehead, his cheekbones and his chin were straight out of the most arrogantly lovely Ghirlandaio in all the museums of the world.

"Daniel!" she called out, bounding down the steps, and from the way he smiled at her in reply she thought that maybe it was possible that they were already in love. But she understood, as well, that it would be wrong to ask or even to wonder.

Grandison Whiting was a tall, spare-limbed, thin-faced, pilgrimish man who stood in violent contradiction to his own flamboyantly bushy beard, a beard of the brightest carrot-orange, a beard that any pirate could have gloried in. His suit was puritanically plain, but across the muted check of the waistcoat hung a swag of gold

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chain so heavy as to seem actually serviceable in conjunction, say, with manacles or fetters. And glinting within the cuffs of his coat were cufflinks blazoned with diamonds larger than any that Daniel had ever seen, even in the windows of the Des Moines branch of Tiffany's, so that he seemed to wear, not his heart, but his checkbook on his sleeve.

His manners and accent were uniquely, unnaturally his own; neither English nor Iowan, but a peculiar hybrid of both that preserved the purr of the former and the twang of the latter. You would have felt almost guilty to say that you liked such a person as Grandison Whiting, but, for all that, Daniel didn't positively dislike him. His strangeness was fascinating, like the strangeness of some exotic bird illustrated in a book of color plates, a heron or an ibis or a cockatoo.

As to the nest that this rare bird inhabited, Daniel was in no such state of equivocation. All of Worry made Daniel uncomfortable. You couldn't walk on the carpets or sit on the chairs without thinking you'd do them some damage. And, of all the rooms that Daniel had been taken through, Grandison Whiting's drawing room, where they'd come at five for "tea," was, if not the grandest, surely the most elegantly perishable. Not that Daniel, by this time, was still making sharp distinctions among the degrees of bon ton. It was all equally unthinkable, and hours ago he'd closed his mind to any but the simplest sense of having to resist the various intimidations of so much money. If you once allowed yourself to admire any of it — the spoons, the cups, the sugar bowl, the exquisite creamer filled with cream as thick and gloppy as mucilage — where would you stop? So he shut it out: he took his tea without sugar or cream and passed up all the cakes for one dry curl of unbuttered toast.

No one urged him to change his mind.

After they'd been introduced all round and the weather had been deplored, Grandison Whiting asked Daniel what he had thought of the harpsichord. Daniel (who'd been expecting a genuine antique, not a modern reconstruction built in Boston forty years ago) replied, guardedly, that it was nothing like a piano, that the touch, and the two manuals, would take some getting used to. What he'd said at the time, to Boa, was "Weird"; what he hadn't said, even to her, was that the Steinway grand was as far beyond his ken as the harpsichord (or as the harp, for that matter), just as weird, in the sense of being wholly and unsettlingly beautiful.

Then Boa's sister Alethea (in a white dress as stiff and resplendent as the table napkins) asked him how, in the wilderness of Amesville, he had managed to take piano lessons. He said he was self-taught, which she must have suspected was less than the whole truth, for she insisted: "Entirely?" He nodded, but with a smile meant to be teasing. She was already, at fifteen, a fanatic in the cause of her own all-conquering good looks. Daniel wondered if she weren't actually the more interesting of the two sisters: interesting as

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an object, like some dainty cup with flowers painted on it in microscopic detail, or like an armchair with golden legs carved into watery shapes, with that same eggshell elegance, the same intrinsic, unhesitating disdain for boors, bears, clods, and paupers like himself, which Daniel found (somewhat guiltily) arousing. Boa, by contrast, seemed just another person, a contender in the sweepstakes of growth and change, who sometimes would pull ahead of him, sometimes fall behind. No doubt the family money was in her blood as much as it was in Alethea's, but its effect on her was problematical, whereas with Alethea it was as though the money had blotted out everything else: as though she were the *form* that money took translated into flesh and blood — no longer a problem, just a fact.

Alethea went on, with wonderful aplomb considering that no one seemed interested, about horses and riding. Her father listened abstractedly, his manicured fingers patting the tangles of his fantastic beard.

Alethea fell silent.

No one took the initiative.

"Mr. Whiting," said Daniel, "was it you I spoke to earlier, when I was at the gatehouse?"

"I'm sorry to have to say it was. Candidly, Daniel, I hoped I might wriggle out of that one. Did you recognize my voice? Everyone does, it seems."

"I only meant to apologize."

"Apologize? Nonsense! I was in the wrong, and you called me down for it quite properly. Indeed, it was then, hanging up the phone and blushing for my sins, that I decided I must have you come to tea. Wasn't it, Alethea? She was with me, you see, when the alarm went off."

"The alarms go off a dozen times a day," Boa said. "And they're always false alarms. Father says it's the price we have to pay."

"Does it seem an excess of caution?" Grandison Whiting asked rhetorically. "No doubt it is. But it's probably best to err on that side, don't you think? In future when you visit you must let us know in advance, so that we may shut off the scanner, or whatever they call it. And I sincerely hope you *will* return, if only for Bobo's sake. I'm afraid she's been feeling rather ... cut-off? ... since she came back from the greater world beyond Iowa." He raised his hand, as though to forestall Boa's protests. "I know it's not for me to say that. But one of the few advantages of being a parent is that one may take liberties with one's children."

"Or so he claims," said Boa. "But in fact he takes all the liberties he can, with whoever allows it."

"It's nice of you to say so, Bobo, since that gives me leave to ask Daniel — you will allow me to call you Daniel, won't you? And you must call me Grandison."

Serjeant snickered.

Grandison Whiting nodded toward his son, by way of acknowledgement, and continued: "To ask you, Daniel (as I know I have no right to): Why have you never had that terrible apparatus removed from your stomach?

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You're quite entitled to, aren't you? As I understand it — and I've had to give the matter some consideration, since officially I'm on the governing board of the state prison system — only convicts who are paroled, or who've committed much more ... heinous crimes than yours —"

"Which isn't," Boa hastened to remind her father, "any crime at all, since the court's decision."

"Thank you, dear — that's exactly my point. Why, Daniel, having been wholly exonerated, do you submit to the inconvenience and, I daresay, the embarrassment of the sort of thing that happened today?"

"Oh, you learn where the alarms are. And you don't go back."

"Pardon me, um, Daniel," said Serjeant, with vague good will, "but I'm not quite following. How is it that you go about setting off alarms?"

"When I was in prison," Daniel explained, "I had a P-W lozenge embedded in my stomach. The lozenge is gone, so there's no chance of my blowing us all up accidentally, but the housing for it is still there, and that, or the traces of metal in it, is what sets off alarms."

"But why is it still there?"

"I could have it taken out if I wanted, but I'm squeamish about surgery. If they could get it out as easily as they got it in, I'd have no objections."

"Is it a big operation?" Alethea asked, wrinkling her nose in pretty revulsion.

"Not according to the doctors. But —" He lifted his shoulders: "One man's meat...."

Alethea laughed.

He was feeling more and more sure of himself, even cocky. This was a routine he'd often gone through, and it always made him feel like Joan of Arc or Galileo, a modern martyr of the Inquisition. He also felt something of a hypocrite, since the reason he'd kept the P-W housing in his stomach (as anyone who thought about it would have known) was that, so long as he was still wired for prison, he couldn't be drafted into the National Guard. Not that he minded being or feeling hypocritical. Hadn't he read, in Reverend Van Dyke's book, that we're all hypocrites and liars in the eyes of God? To deny that was only to be self-deluded besides.

However, some molecular switch inside must have responded to this tremor of guilt, for much to his own surprise Daniel started to tell Grandison Whiting of the corruption and abuses he'd witnessed at Spirit Lake. This, on the grounds that Whiting, being on the governing board of the state's prisons, might be able to do something. He developed quite a head of steam about the system of food vouchers you had to buy just to keep alive, but even at the height of it he could see he was making a tactical error. Grandison Whiting listened to the exposé with a glistening attentiveness behind which Daniel could sense not indignation but the meshing of various cogs and gears of a logical rebuttal. Clearly, Whiting had known already of the evils Daniel was denouncing.

Boa, at the close of Daniel's tale, expressed a hearty sense of the wrong

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being done, which would have been more gratifying if he hadn't seen her through so many other tirades in the Iceberg's classroom. More surprising was Serjeant's response. Though it amounted to no more than his saying that it didn't seem fair, he must have known that he would be flying in the face of his father's as-yet-unexpressed opinion.

After a long and dour look at his son, Grandison Whiting brightened to a formal smile, and said, quietly: "Justice *isn't* always fair."

"You must excuse me," said Alethea, putting aside her cup and rising, "but I see that father means to have a serious discussion, and that is a pastime, like bridge, that I've never learned how to enjoy."

"As you please, my dear," said her father. "And, indeed, if the rest of you would prefer...?"

"Nonsense," said Boa. "We're just beginning to enjoy ourselves." She took hold of Daniel's hand and squeezed. "Aren't we?"

Daniel went, "Mm."

Serjeant took another pastry from the plate, his fourth.

"Let us say, for the sake of argument," said Boa, pouring tea, and then cream, into Daniel's cup, "that justice *is* always fair."

Grandison Whiting folded his hands across his waistcoat, just above his watchchain. "Justice is always just, certainly. But fairness is to justice as common sense is to logic. That is to say, justice may (and often does) transcend fairness. Fairness usually boils down to a simple, heartfelt conviction that the world should be ordered with one's own convenience in mind. Fairness is a child's view of justice. Or a bum's."

"Oh, Father, don't go off on bums." She turned to Daniel. "I don't know how many times we've had the same argument. Always about bums. It's father's hobbyhorse."

"Bums," he went on imperturbably, "as opposed to beggars. Men who have chosen abjection as a way of life, without the extenuating circumstances of blindness, amputation, or imbecility."

"Men," Boa contradicted, "who simply can't take responsibility for themselves. Men who are helpless before a world that is, after all, a pretty rough place."

"Helpless? So they would have us believe. But all men are responsible for themselves, by definition. All adults, that is. Bums, however, insist on remaining children, in a state of absolute dependency. Think of the most incorrigible such wretch you've seen, and imagine him at the age of five instead of five-and-fifty. What change might you observe? There he is, smaller no doubt, but in moral terms the same spoiled child, whining over his miseries, wheedling to have his way, with no plans except for the next immediate gratification, which he will either bully *us* into giving him or, failing that, will attempt to seduce from us by the grandeur and mystery of his abasement."

"As you may have gathered, Daniel, we're not speaking of a completely hypothetical bum. There was a real

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man, one summer when we were in Minneapolis, with a shoe missing and a cut over one eye, and this man had the temerity to ask Father for a quarter. Father told him: 'There's the gutter. Be my guest.'"

"She misquotes me, Daniel. I said: 'I would prefer, really, to contribute directly.' And dropped what change I had in my pocket down the nearest drain."

"Jesus," said Daniel, despite himself.

"Perhaps the moral was too astringent to be improving. I confess to having had more than my sufficiency of brandy after dinner. But was it an *unjust* observation? It was he who had chosen to go down the drain, and he'd achieved his desire. Why should I be called on to subsidize his more extensive self-destruction? There are better causes."

"You may be just, Father, but you aren't at all fair. That poor man had simply been defeated by life. Is he to be *blamed* for that?"

"Who but the defeated are to be blamed for a defeat?" Grandison Whiting asked in turn.

"The victors?" Daniel suggested.

Grandison Whiting laughed, somewhat in the manner of his beard. Even so, it didn't register as wholly genuine: its warmth was the warmth of an electric coil, not of a flame. "That was very good, Daniel. I quite liked that."

"Though you'll note he doesn't go so far as to say that you're right," Boa pointed out. "Nor has he said anything about all the horrors you've told us about Spirit Lake."

"Oh, I'm slippery."

"But, really, Father, something ought to be done. What Daniel described is more than unfair — it's illegal."

"In fact, my dear, the question of its legality has been argued before several courts, and it's always been decided that prisoners have a *right* to buy such food as they can to supplement what the prison provides. As to its fairness, or justice, I believe myself that the voucher system performs a valuable social function: it reinforces that most precious and tenuous of ties, which connects the prisoner to the outside world, to which he must one day return. It's much better than getting letters from home. Anyone can understand a hamburger; not everyone can read."

Daniel's indignation had escalated from being politely scandalized to full rankling outrage. "Mr. Whiting, that is a sinful thing to say! That is brutal!"

"As you said yourself, Daniel — one man's meat...."

He gathered his wits. "Aside from the fact that it creates a situation where guards profit from the prisoners' misery, which you have to admit is not a healthy situation...."

"*Prison* is not a healthy situation, Daniel."

"Aside from that, what about the people who just don't *have* any ties to be 'reinforced'? And no money. There were lots of those. And they were slowly starving to death. I *saw* them."

"That's *why* they were there, Daniel — for you to see. They were an example, for any who might suppose,

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mistakenly, that it is possible to get through life alone, without what the sociologists call primary ties. Such an example is a powerful socializing influence. You might say it's a cure for alienation."

"You can't be serious."

"Ah, but I am. I'll admit that I wouldn't put the matter quite so plainly in a public forum, but I do believe what I've been saying. It is not, as Boa would have it, 'just for effect.' Indeed, as to whether the system works, recidivism rates show that it does. If prisons are to act as a deterrent to crime, then they must be significantly more unpleasant than the environments available outside of prison. The so-called humane prisons bred career criminals by the millions. Since we began, some twenty years ago, to make the prisons in Iowa distinctly less congenial places to pass the time, the number of released convicts who return on a second offense has been enormously reduced."

"They don't return to prison because they leave Iowa the minute they're released."

"Splendid. Their behavior outside Iowa is not our concern as members of the state board. If they've reformed, so much the better. If not, we're well rid of them."

Daniel felt stymied. He considered further objections, but he began to see how each of them might be stood on its head. He found himself admiring Whiting, in a sneaky way. Perhaps 'admire' was too strong. There was a fascination, certainly.

But did it (this fascination) derive from the man's ideas (which were not, after all, so original as to be beyond comparison) or rather from knowing that this was the actual and unique Grandison Whiting, celebrated and vilified in newspapers and on TV? A man, therefore, more real than other men, more vivid, composed of some lordlier substance so that even his hair seemed more red than all other red hair, the lines of his face more crisply expressive, and the inflections of his speech full of larger significances.

There was more talk, along less divisive lines, and even some laughter. Serjeant so far overcame his shyness (not of Daniel but of his father) as to tell a droll and fairly scathing story about his analyst's extramarital difficulties. Boa insisted on telling about Daniel's moment of glory in Mrs. Norberg's class and made it sound a much larger moment than it had been. Then, as the talk began noticeably to flag, a servant came in to tell Mr. Whiting that he was wanted on the telephone, urgently, by Miss Marspan.

Grandison Whiting excused himself.

A moment later Serjeant took his leave.

"Well," said Boa eagerly, "what do you think?"

"About your father?"

"He's incredible, isn't he?"

"Yes. He is incredible." That was all he said, nor did she seem to require more.

The snow had continued steadily through the afternoon. It was arranged that Daniel would ride home in the next car going in to town. He had only a twenty-minute wait at the gatehouse

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(with a different and much friendlier guard on duty), and there was the further good luck that his ride was in a pickup, in the back of which he could put his bicycle.

At first Daniel couldn't understand why the driver of the truck was glaring at him with such a degree of unprovoked ill will. Then he recognized him: Carl Mueller, Eugene's brother, but more to the point, Roy Mueller's oldest son. It was common knowledge that Carl worked at Worry, but in all his daydreams since he'd started being a friend of Boa Whiting, Daniel had never indulged in this one.

"Carl!" he said slipping off a mitten, holding out his hand.

Carl glowered and kept both gloved hands on the steering wheel.

"Carl," Daniel insisted. "Hey, it's been a long time."

The guard was standing by the open gate, above which a lighted sign commanded them still to WAIT. He seemed to be watching them, though against the dazzle of the truck's headlights this small contest must have passed unwitnessed. Even so, Carl appeared to have been unnerved, for he conceded Daniel the acknowledgment of a grimace.

WAIT changed to PASS.

"Christ, this is some snowstorm, isn't it?" Daniel said, as they moved ahead in second gear along the path that Worry's own plows had cleared not long before.

Carl said nothing.

"The first real blizzard of the year," he went on, twisting sideways in his seat so as to look directly at Carl's stony profile. "Will you look at it come down."

Carl said nothing.

"He's incredible, isn't he?"

Carl said nothing. He shifted to third. The truck's rear end swayed on the packed snow.

"That Whiting is incredible. A real character."

With a slow unsymmetrical rhythm the wipers pushed the wet snow off the sides of the windshield.

"Friendly, though, once he puts aside his company manners. Not that he ever lets it *all* hang out, I suppose. You'd know that better than I. But he does like to talk. And theories? More theories than a physics textbook. And one or two of them would set a few people I know back on their fat asses. I mean, he's not your average run-of-the-mill fiscal conservative. Not a Republican in the grand old tradition of Iowa's own Herbert Hoover."

"I don't know what you're fucking talking about, Weinreb, and I'm not interested. So why not just shut the fuck up, unless you want to ride that bicycle the rest of the way to town."

"Oh, I don't think you'd do that, Carl. Risk a swell *managerial* position like yours? Risk your exemption?"

"Listen, you goddamn draft dodger, don't talk to *me* about exemptions."

"Draft dodger?"

"And you fucking well know it."

"As I see it, Carl, I performed *my* service to God and country at Spirit Lake. And while I'll admit I'm not exactly anxious to go off to Detroit and protect the good people of Iowa from

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dangerous teen-agers, the government knows where I am. If they want me, all they have to do is write and ask."

"Yeah. Well, they probably know what they're up to, not drafting shits like you."

"Up yours, Carl. And up your fucking father's too."

Carl stepped, too suddenly, on the brake. The truck's back wheels sloughed to the right. For a moment it looked like they'd do a complete spin, but Carl managed to ease them back on course.

"You put me out here," Daniel said shrilly, "and you'll lose that fat job tomorrow. You do *anything* but take me to my front door, and I'll have your ass for it. And if you think I can't, just wait. Just wait *anyhow*."

"Chickenshit," Carl replied softly. "Chickenshit Jewish cocksucker." But he took his foot off the brake.

Neither said any more till the truck pulled up in front of the Weinreb house on Chickasaw Avenue.

Before getting out of the cab Daniel said, "Don't pull away till I've got my bike out of the back. Right?"

Carl nodded, avoiding Daniel's eyes.

"Well, then, good night, and thanks for the lift." Once more he held out his hand.

Carl took the offered hand and grasped it firmly. "So long, faggot."

His eyes locked with Daniel's and it became a contest. There was something implacable in Carl's face, a force of belief beyond anything that Daniel could have ever mustered.

He looked away.

***

When Daniel had left Worry it was six thirty, but already it had seemed the dead of night. By the time he was home, after the slow drive through the snowstorm, he had expected no more than leftovers heated up. But in fact his mother had waited dinner. The table was set and everyone was watching a panel discussion about the new fertilizers in the living room. They had not waited, the twins in particular, with much good grace, and before Daniel was out of his windbreaker and had given his hands a symbolic splash in the wash basin (saving the water for the toilet tank), they were all of them sitting down and his mother was spooning out servings of tuna fish casserole. Aurelia passed the plate of sliced bread with a look of malevolence. Cecelia giggled.

"You didn't have to wait dinner for me, you know. I said I'd be home late."

"Fifteen after seven is not an unthinkable hour for dinner," Milly said, more for the sake of the twins than for him. "In New York City, for instance, people often don't have anything to eat before nine, even ten o'clock."

"Uh'huh," said Cecelia sarcastically.

"Did you have a nice time?" his father asked. It was rare nowadays that his father asked even so much as that, for Daniel had become protective of his privacy.

Daniel tapped a finger to his mouth, full of the tuna and noodles.

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The casserole had cooked too long, and the noodles were dry and hard to swallow. "Terrific," he finally brought out. "You wouldn't *believe* their piano. It's as big as a pingpong table practically."

"That's all you did, all afternoon?" Cecelia asked. "Played a piano?"

"And a harpsichord. And an electric organ. There was even a cello, but I couldn't really do anything with that. Except touch it."

"Didn't you even *look* at the horses?" Aurelia asked. She turned to Milly plaintively. "The horses out there are so *famous.*"

"Perhaps Daniel isn't interested in horses," Milly suggested.

"I didn't see the horses, but I did see Grandison Whiting."

"Did you," said Milly.

Daniel took a meditative sip of milky tea.

"Well?" said Cecelia.

"Was he nice to you?" Aurelia asked, coming right to the point.

"I wouldn't say nice, exactly. He was friendly. He has a big bushy red beard and a ring on his finger with a diamond on it as big as a strawberry." He measured the approximate size of the strawberry between finger and thumb. "A small strawberry," he conceded.

"I *knew* he had a beard," said Cecelia. "I saw *that* on TV."

"What did you say to him?" Aurelia asked.

"Oh, we talked about a lot of things. Mostly politics, I guess you'd say."

Milly set down her fork judgmentally. "Oh, Daniel — don't you have a grain of sense?"

"It was an interesting conversation," he said defensively. "I think he *enjoyed* it. Anyhow *he* did most of the talking, and Boa got her licks in, as usual. I was what you're always saying I should be — an intelligent listener."

"I'd like to know what's wrong with talking about politics," his father demanded. It was Mr. Weinreb's stated conviction that Daniel's friendship with the daughter of the richest man in Iowa was not to be regarded as an exceptional occurrence and did not require special handling.

"Nothing," said Milly, "nothing at all." She didn't agree with her husband about this but wasn't prepared, yet, to make an issue of it. "Cecilia, you eat the peas too."

"Peas have vitamins," said Aurelia smugly. She was already on her second helping.

"How'd you get home?" his father asked.

"There was a pickup coming in to town. They stopped it at the gate. If that hadn't come along, they were going to send me back in a limousine."

"Are you going back next Saturday?" Aurelia asked.

"Probably."

"You shouldn't overdo it, Daniel," Milly said.

"She's my girlfriend, Mom. She can come here. I can go there. It's that simple. Right?"

"Nothing's that simple."

"Why don't you ask her to dinner with us?" Aurelia suggested.

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"Don't be silly, Aurelia," Milly scolded. "You're all acting like Daniel's never been out of the house before. And, by the way, Daniel, there was a phone call for you."

"I answered," said Cecilia. "It was a girl." She turned Daniel's own ploy against him and waited to be asked.

"So? Who?"

"She wouldn't say what her name was. But it sounded like Old Wiremouth to me."

"Don't make fun of people with braces," said her father sharply. "Someday you'll probably have them too."

"And eat your peas," Milly added.

"They're burnt."

"They're not burnt. Eat them."

"They'll make me throw up."

"I don't care. Eat them."

"What did she want, the girl who called?"

Cecelia stared balefully at a teaspoon-size mound of peas sticky with white sauce. "She wanted to know where you were. I said you were out, but I didn't know where. Now I wish I'd *told* her."

Daniel reached over with his spoon and scooped up all but three of the peas. Before Milly could say a word, he'd eaten them.

Cecelia gave him a grateful smile.

Down in his own room, with the first fifteen exercises of Hanon's *Virtuoso Pianist* behind him (which was as much as he could get through in his allotted hour of practice), Daniel decided he would *not* do his homework for chemistry. Nor would he read the Willa Cather novel for Eng Lit. He'd read the paperback Boa had given him, *How To Behave in Order To Develop the Personality You Want* by The Develop-Mental Corporation of Portland, Oregon.

Boa had got the book from her brother Serjeant, who had got it in turn from a college roommate. The book had convinced Serjeant to drop out of college and take (briefly) boxing lessons. It had convinced Boa to have her hair cut short (it had since grown out again) and to get up every morning at six to study Italian (which, to her own and everyone's amazement, she was still doing). Daniel thought that he was already doing approximately his utmost by way of advancing slowly and steadily toward his major life goals, but he wasn't so sure that his personality couldn't bear improvement. In any case Boa had been insistent that he should read it.

Daniel was a naturally fast reader. He'd finished the book by ten o'clock. Generally he didn't think that much of it. It was self-help at a pretty simple-minded level, with lots of mottoes you were supposed to whisper to yourself in order to get motivated. But he understood why Boa had wanted him to read it. It was for the sake of the Second Law of Develop-Mental Mechanics, which appeared first on page 12 (where it was heavily underscored by a ballpoint pen) and was then repeated many times throughout.

The Second Law of Develop-Mental Mechanics is as follows: "If you want something, you've got to take it. If you want it badly enough, you will."

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The Second Law of Develop-Mental Mechanics notwithstanding, it was some time before this tacit promise was to be fulfilled. Boa herself was not at once persuaded that her virginity should be numbered among the somethings that get taken by those who want them badly enough. Then, by the time she'd been brought round, early in April, Daniel found himself unaccustomedly beset by technical difficulties. But a way was found, and they became, just as Boa had imagined they would, and just as Daniel had imagined too, lovers.

In June, Daniel was faced with an awkward choice; which is to say, a real one. All through the school year he had been confidently expecting to fail Mrs. Norberg's Social Studies class, but when the grades were posted, he came off with an almost miraculous B (the same grade Boa got). All at once it became possible to take up Bob Lundgren's standing offer to work again that summer at his farm. Lundgren, rehabilitated by the horrors of Spirit Lake, was now in charge of one of his father's farms. For the past two summers Daniel had worked for him, supervising work crews of convicts from their own alma mater. This summer Lundgren was offering more than even last year's munificent wages. Eighteen weeks at $230 a week meant more than $4,000. Even taking into account the expense of weekend carousals in Elmore and a further outlay for some sort of motorbike in order to keep on visiting Worry, the job would still have meant a bigger chunk of money than he could hope to put aside by any other means. The fact remained, however, that he didn't really need so much money. In his overweening pride he had only applied to one college, Boston Conservatory. He hadn't expected to get in (except in the idiot way he half expected all his wishes to come true), and he hadn't. His tapes were returned with a letter saying very bluntly that his playing in no way measured up to the conservatory's minimum requirements.

Boa, meanwhile, had been accepted at all but one of the eight schools she'd applied to. Accordingly, their plan for next year was for Daniel to find a room and a job of some sort near the college of Boa's choice. Harvard seemed the likeliest, since maybe Daniel would get into the Conservatory on his next try, and meanwhile he'd be able to start taking voice lessons, Boston being so musical.

As to the summer just ahead, Daniel had been expecting to stay in Amesville to repair his inevitable F in Social Studies, the bright side of which was that he'd have been able to see Boa just about any day he liked. Also, Boa's favorite aunt from London was going to pay a long visit to Worry, and this aunt, Miss Harriet Marspan, was a musical amateur in the old sense of doing and caring for nothing else — and for its own sake, never thinking where it might lead nor what profit it might yield. Boa thought she performed with unusual capacity and immense good taste. The three of them would form the Marspan Iowa Consort, to which end Boa had already sewn together a

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sort of banner of welcome and hung it across the whole width of the music room.

However if Daniel went off to work for Bob Lundgren, the Marspan Iowa Consort would amount to no more than an old pink sheet with assorted scraps of cotton stitched to it. Yet if he stayed, what would he be accomplishing? For all her excellences Miss Harriet Marspan didn't sound like a natural ally. Even her devotion to music made him uneasy when he thought about it, for how was Daniel to measure up to standards of accomplishment formed in one of the musical capitals of the world? She would flay him, like another Marsyas.

But, then again, some time or other he'd have to take the plunge; he'd have to leave the audience and join the chorus on the stage. However; and yet; but then again — the questions and qualifications multiplied endlessly. And yet it ought to have been a simple choice. But then again.

On the night before he had to give a final yes or no to Bob Lundgren, Milly came down to his room with a pot of coffee and two cups. With a minimum of beating around the bush (without even pouring the coffee) she asked what he was going to do.

"I wish I knew," he said.

"You'll have to make up your mind soon."

"I know. And that's about all I know."

"I'd be the last person in the world to tell you to pass up a chance to earn the kind of money you earned last summer. It's twice what you're worth."

"And then some," he agreed.

"Besides which, there's the experience."

"For sure, it's a good experience."

"I meant it could lead to more of the same, numskull. If you want to do that kind of work for a living, and, God knows, in this day and age it's about the only kind of work that has a guaranteed future."

"Mm. But it isn't what I want. Not forever."

"I didn't suppose it was. So what it boils down to — pardon me for putting it so bluntly — is whether you want to take that big a gamble."

"Gamble?"

"Don't make me spell it out, Danny. I am not a fool. I wasn't born yesterday."

"I still don't know what you mean."

"For heaven's sake, I know that you and Miss Whiting aren't performing duets down here *all* the time. You can hear that piano all over the house — when someone's playing it."

"Are you complaining?"

"Would it do any good? No, in fact, I think it's *wonderful* that you two young people should have strong interests in common." She grinned accusingly. "And what you choose to do down here is none of my business."

"Thanks."

"So I'll say only this: nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"You think I should stay in town this summer."

"Let's say I won't reproach you for enjoying yourself a bit, if that's what

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you want to do. And I'll see that Abe doesn't either."

He shook his head. "It's not what you think, Mom. I mean, I *like* Boa and all, but we neither of us believe in ... um...."

"Matrimony?"

"You said it, I didn't."

"Well, candidly, neither did I at your age. But anyone who crosses the street can be hit by a truck."

Daniel laughed. "Really, Mom, you've got it all turned round backwards. The way I see it, the real choice is whether I can afford to turn down the money Bob is offering for the sake of having a bit of fun."

"Money is a consideration, that's so. No matter how nice they are, or how considerate, rich people *will* involve you in spending more than you can possibly afford. I sometimes think it's their way of weeding the rest of us out. I say that from bitter experience."

"Mom, that's not the case. I mean, there's no way to spend that kind of money in Amesville. Much less, at Worry."

"Well, well. I'd love to be proven wrong. But if you should need a few dollars sometime, to tide you over, I'll see what I can do."

"That's very sweet of you. I think."

Milly looked pleased. "One more word of advice, and I'll leave you to the horns of your dilemma. Which is — I trust that one of you is taking suitable precautions."

"Um, yes. Usually."

"Always. With the rich, you know, things don't work the same. If a girl finds herself pregnant, she can go off for a holiday and get rid of her embarrassment."

"Jesus, Mom, I hope you don't think I've been *planning* to get Boa knocked up. I'm not *stupid.*"

"A word to the wise. But if my back should ever be turned, you'll find what you need in the upper-left drawer of the chest of drawers. Lately, though this is strictly between us, *I* haven't had much use for them."

"Mom, you're too much."

"I do what I can." She held up the coffee pot. "You want any?"

He shook his head, then reconsidered and nodded, and finally decided against it and said no.

Though she had been three times married, Miss Harriet Marspan seemed, at the age of thirty-seven, the incarnation of Spinsterhood, its deity or patron saint, but at the huntress rather than the virgin-martyr end of the scale. She was a tall, sturdy-looking woman with prematurely gray hair and sharp, appraising gray eyes. She knew all her own good points and the basic skills of enhancing them, but nothing she could do could counteract the basic chill emanating from her as from the entrance to a food locker. Miss Marspan was oblivious to this, and acted on the assumption that she was rather a lot of fun. She had a silvery, if not contagious, laugh, a shrewd wit, perfect pitch, and unremitting powers of concentration.

Boa had become her favorite niece during the term of her exile to Vilars, to which Miss Marspan, though not a

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skier, had made several visits at the height of the season. Additionally, Boa had twice spent the holidays with Miss Marspan at her Chelsea flat, being taken about to operas, concerts, and private musicales every night of her visit. At the dinner table of Lord and Lady Bromley (Bromley was an important television producer) Boa had sat between the composer Lucia Johnstone and the great castrato Ernesto Rey. And through it all they had pursued with endless patience, with infinite caution, with delectable subtlety, the one subject in which Miss Marspan chose to interest herself — musical taste.

As to music per se, Boa thought that for a woman of such definite opinions Miss Marspan was oddly lacking in preferences. She could (for instance) make the finest discriminations among the various interpretations of a Duparc song but seemed to have little interest in the song itself, except as an arrangement of vowels and consonants to be produced in accordance with the rules of French phonetics. "Music," she liked to say, "doesn't *mean* a thing." Yet the music she enjoyed the most was Wagner's, and she was a mine of information about the associated stage business she'd witnessed during different performances of the Ring. Daniel found this more disconcerting than Boa, who was used to similar equivocations from her father. Boa insisted that it must be simply a matter of age: after a while one took the basic amazement of art for granted, much as one might take for granted the rising of the sun in the morning, its setting in the evening. As a theory Daniel couldn't fault this, but he wasn't convinced either. He disliked and distrusted Miss Marspan, all the while he strained to make a good impression on her. In her presence he behaved as he would have behaved in a church, moving slowly, speaking deliberately, saying nothing that might contradict her established doctrines. Never, for instance, did he declare his deep-felt conviction that Raynor Taylor's music was dust from the tomb; he deferred as well in the matter of Moravian hymns of Colonial America. He even started enjoying the hymns after a while. The Marspan Iowa Consort never did undertake anything Daniel thought of as serious music, which was both a disappointment and a relief. For all his practice and preparations in the past two years (more than two years now!) he knew he wasn't ready for much more than the catches, ditties, jingles, and rounds that Miss Marspan, with the help of the library's data-links, was so ingenious in unearthing from assorted music libraries around the country.

Though he didn't say so to Boa, not even after Miss Marspan had left, Daniel felt ashamed of himself. He knew that somehow he had cooperated in the subversion of his own principles. The excuse he'd offered himself at the time — that the hours of chit-chat with Miss Marspan had been so vacuous as to amount to no more than the silence he'd maintained in Mrs. Norberg's classroom — was a crock of shit. What he'd done, plain and simply, was to was suck up to her. It was true, then, about money: if you so much as rubbed

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shoulders with it, it began to corrupt you.

One day, during the most ruthless part of August, and just after the twins had been packed off with a dozen other Brownies for their first taste of summer camp, Milly announced that she was being taken to Minneapolis for a full week of movies, shopping, and sybaritic sloth. "I'm tired," she declared, "of swatting mosquitoes in a rented cabin while Abe goes off to stare at the ripples in the pond. It's not my idea of a vacation; it never has been." Daniel's father, who had in fact been planning another fishing trip, gave in without even trying to negotiate a compromise. Unless, as seemed likely, the negotiations had already been handled off-stage and the official supper-time capitulation had been put on entirely for Daniel's benefit. The upshot of his parents' departure was that Daniel, who had often been a guest for lunch and dinner, was asked to stay at Worry for the whole week they were to be gone.

He'd thought that by now he couldn't be fazed, that he'd confronted enough of the place's pomps and splendors, had touched and tasted them often enough that a more steady view would have no power over him. But he was fazed, and it did have considerable power. He was given the room next to Boa's, which was still provided, from the era of Miss Marspan's visit, with a prodigious sound system, including a horseshoe organ he could play (using earphones) at any hour of the day or night. The height of the ceiling as he sprawled in his bed, the more formidable height of the windows that rose to within inches of the moldings, the view from these windows across a small forest of unblighted elms (the largest concentration of elm trees left in Iowa), the waxed glow of rosewood and cherry furnishings, the hypnotic intricacies of the carpets (there were three), the silence, the coolness, the sense of wishes endlessly, effortlessly gratified: it was hard to keep any psychological distance from such things, hard not to desire and (therefore) covet them. You were always being stroked, caressed, seduced — by the scent and slither of the soap, by the sheets on the bed, by the colors of the paintings on the walls, the same enamel-like colors that appeared, fizzing in his head, when he squeezed his eyes closed during orgasm: pinks that deepened to a dusky rose, deliquescent blues, mauves and lavenders, celadon greens and lemon yellows. Like courtesans pretending to be no more than matrons of a certain elegance, these paintings, in their carved and gilded frames, hung on damask walls quite as though they were, as they declared, mere innocent bowls of fruit and sworls of paint. In fact, they were all incitements to rape.

Everywhere you looked: sex. He could think of nothing else. He'd sit at the dinner table, talking about whatever (or, more likely, listening), and the taste of the sauce on his tongue became one with the taste of Boa an hour before when they'd made love, a taste that might be overwhelmed, all at once, by a spasm of total pleasure right

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there at the dinner table that would stiffen his spine and immobilize his mind. He would look at Boa (or, just as often, at Alethea) and his imagination would begin to rev until it had gone out of control, until there was nothing in his head but the image, immense and undifferentiated, of their copulation. Not even theirs, really, but a cosmic abstraction, a disembodied, blissful rhythm that even the flames of the candles obeyed.

It was the same when they would listen to music. He had read, in some book of advice lent him by Mrs. Boismortier, that it was a bad idea to listen to too many records. The way to discover what any piece of music was about was to perform it yourself, or lacking that, to hear it performed live. The habit of listening to records was a form of self-abuse. But, ah, there is something to be said for the habit. Lord God, such music as they listened to that week! Such pleasures as they shared! Such flurries of fingers, such cadences and cadenzas, such amazing transitions to the minor key, such sighs and smiles and secret sympathies suddenly made plain as in the most brilliant and luminous of mirrors!

It dawned on him that this is what being in love was all about. This was why people made such a fuss over it. Why they said it made the world go round. It did! He stood with Boa on the roof of Worry's tower and watched the sun above the green body of the earth and felt himself to be, with her, ineffably, part of a single process that began in that faraway furnace that burned atoms into energy. He could not have explained how this was so, nor could he hold on for more than a moment to his highest sense of that enveloping Love, the moment when he had felt needles of light piercing his and Boa's separate flesh, knitting their bodies like two threads into the intricate skein of that summer's profusions. It was only a single moment, and it went.

But every time they made love it was as though they were moving toward that moment again, slowly at first; then suddenly it would be there again in its immense, arisen majesty within them, and still the delirium swelled as they moved from height to effortless height, exalted, exulting, exiles from earth, set free from gravity and the laws of motion. It was heaven, and they had the keys. How could they have kept themselves from returning, even supposing they had wanted to?

Late on the last night of his sojourn at Worry, returning from Boa's room to his own, Daniel was met in the hallway by Roberts, Mr. Whiting's valet. In a confidential whisper Roberts said that Mr. Whiting would like to have a word with Daniel in his office. Would he come this way? It seemed useless to plead that he wasn't properly dressed to visit Mr. Whiting. So off he went, in his bathrobe and slippers, to the drawing room in which he'd first taken tea with the family, then through a kind of lock connecting that room to the inner keep, a sealed corridor of whirling motors, winking lights, and eccentric clockwork contraptions. He wondered, walking through this fairy-trap, if

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it had ever actually served the purpose for which it had been built. Were there, lost in the perpetual rotary motion of these various whirligigs, or caught in the repeating decimal of some data-bank underfoot, snared souls forever unable to return to their flesh? To which question there could be no answer for anyone who entered, as he did now, corporeally.

Grandison Whiting's office was not like other rooms at Worry. It did not astonish. It was furnished with only ordinary office furniture of the better sort: glass bookcases, two wooden desks, some leather chairs. Papers littered every surface. A swivel lamp, the only one burning, was aimed at the door by which he'd come in (Roberts had not followed him through the fairy-trap), but even with the light in his eyes he knew that the man who sat behind the desk could not be Grandison Whiting.

"Good evening, Daniel," the man said, in what was unmistakably Grandison Whiting's voice.

"You've shaved off your beard!"

Grandison Whiting smiled. His teeth, agleam in the subdued light, seemed the exposed roots of his skeleton. His entire face, without his beard, had the stark character of a memento mori.

"No, Daniel, you see me now as I am. My beard, like Santa's, is assumed. When I'm here quite by myself, it is a great relief to be able to take it off."

"It isn't real?"

"It's quite real. See for yourself. It's there in the corner, by the globe."

"I mean...." He blushed. He felt he was making a complete fool of himself, but he couldn't help it. "I mean — *why?*"

"That's what I so much admire in you, Daniel — your directness. Do sit down — over here, out of the glare — and I'll tell you the story of my beard. That is, if you're interested."

"Of course," Daniel said, taking the proffered chair cautiously, so that his bathrobe wouldn't part.

"When I was a young man, a little older than yourself, and about to leave Oxford and return to the states, I had the good fortune to come across a novel in which the hero changes his character by buying and wearing a false beard. I knew that I would have to change *my* character shortly, for I would never be a credit to my position, as they say, until I'd learned to assert myself much more strenuously than I was accustomed to doing. I had tended to be reclusive in my college days, and while I'd learned a good deal concerning economic history, mostly forgotten since, I'd failed utterly to master the essential lesson that my father had sent me to Oxford to learn (and which *he* had learned there); namely, how to be a gentleman.

"You smile, and you do well to smile. Most people, here, suppose that one becomes a gentleman by adopting what is called 'good manners.' Good manners, as you must know (for you've picked them up very quickly), are mainly an encumbrance. In fact, a gentleman is something else entirely. To be a gentleman is to get what you want with only an implicit threat of violence. America, by and large, has

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no gentlemen — only managers and criminals. Managers never assert themselves sufficiently and are content to surrender their autonomy and most of the money they help to generate to us. In return they're allowed the illusion of a guiltless life. Criminals, on the other hand, assert themselves too much and are killed by other criminals, or by us. As always, the middle way is best." Whiting folded his hands with a consciousness of completion.

"Pardon me, Mr. Whiting, but I still don't quite see how wearing a, uh...."

"How a false beard helped me be a gentleman? Quite simply. I had to act as though I weren't embarrassed by my appearance. That meant, at first, I had to overact. I had to become, somehow, the sort of person who would actually *have* such a big bushy red beard. When I did act in that manner I found that people behaved much differently toward me. They listened more closely, laughed louder at my jokes, and in general deferred to my authority."

Daniel nodded. In effect, Grandison Whiting was stating the Third Law of Develop-Mental Mechanics, which is: "Always pretend that you're your favorite movie star — and you will be."

"Have I satisfied your curiosity?"

Daniel was flustered. "I didn't mean to give the impression that, uh —"

"Please, Daniel." Whiting held up his hand, which glowed with a pale roseate translucence in the beam of the lamp. "No false protests. Of course you're curious. I should be dismayed if you were not. I'm curious about you, as well. In fact, the reason I called you from your bed — or rather, from Boa's — was to say that I've taken the liberty of gratifying my curiosity. And also to ask you if your intentions are honest."

"My intentions?"

"Concerning my daughter, with whom you were having, not half an hour ago, intimate relations. Of, if I may say so, the highest quality."

"You were watching us!"

"I was returning a compliment, so to speak. Or has Bobo never mentioned the incident that sent her packing to Vilars?"

"She did but.... Jesus, Mr. Whiting."

"It isn't like you to flounder, Daniel."

"It's hard not to, Mr. Whiting. All I can think to say, once again, is why? We supposed you knew what was going on pretty much. Boa even got the impression that you approved. More or less."

"I suppose I do approve. Whether more or less is what I'm trying to determine now. As to why, it was not (I hope) merely the gratification of a father's natural curiosity. It was so that I'd have the goods on you. It's all down on videotape, you see."

"All?" He was aghast.

"Not all, possibly, but enough."

"Enough for what?"

"To prosecute you, if need be. Bobo is still a minor. You're guilty of statutory rape."

"Oh, Jesus *Christ,* Mr. Whiting, you wouldn't!"

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"No, I don't expect it will be necessary. For one thing, that might force Bobo to marry you against her own wishes, or against yours, for that matter. Since, my lawyer tells me, you could not, in that event, be prosecuted. No, my intention is much simpler: I want to force the issue before you've wasted each other's time in hesitations. Time is too precious for that."

"You're asking *me* if I'll marry your daughter?"

"Well, you didn't seem about to ask *me*. And I can understand that. People generally wait for me to take the initiative. It's the beard, I suppose."

"Have you asked Boa about this?"

"As I see it, Daniel, my daughter's made her choice, and declared it. Rather openly, I should say."

"Not to me."

"The surrender of virginity is unequivocal. It needs no codicil."

"I'm not sure Boa sees it that way."

"She would, I've no doubt, if you asked her to. No one with any sensitivity wants to appear to be haggling over matters of the heart. But in our civilization (as you may have read) certain things go without saying."

"That was my impression too, Mr. Whiting. Until tonight."

Whiting laughed. His new, beardless face modified the usual Falstaffian impression of his laughter.

"If I have forced the issue, Daniel, it was in the hope of preventing your making a needless mistake. This plan of yours to precede Boa to Boston is almost certain to lead to unhappiness for both of you. Here the inequality in your circumstances only lends a piquancy to your relations; there it will become your nemesis. Believe me — I speak as one who has been through it, albeit on the other side of the fence. You may have your pastoral fantasies now, but the good life cannot be led for less than ten thousand a year, and that requires both the right connections and a monastic frugality. Boa, of course, has never known the pinch of poverty. But you have, briefly. But long enough to have learned, surely, that it is to be avoided at all costs."

"I'm not planning to go back to prison, Mr. Whiting, if that's your meaning."

"God forbid you should, Daniel. And please, don't we know each other well enough for you to dispense with 'Mister Whiting'?"

"Then how about 'Your Lordship'? Or 'Excellency'? That wouldn't seem quite as formal as Grandison."

Whiting hesitated, then seemed to decide to be amused. His laugh, if abrupt, had the ring of sincerity.

"Good for you. No one's ever said that to my face. And of course it's perfectly true. Would you like to call me 'Father' then? To return to the original question."

"I still don't see what's so terrible about our going to Boston. What simpler way of finding out if it works?"

"Not terrible, only foolish. Because it won't work. And Boa will have wasted a year of her life trying to make it work. Meanwhile she'll have failed

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to meet the people she's going to college to meet (for that's the reason one goes to college; one can study far better in solitude). Worse than that, she may have done irreparable harm to her reputation. Sadly, not everyone shares *our* enlightened attitude toward these arrangements."

"You don't think she'd be even more compromised by *marrying* me?"

"If I did, I would scarcely go out of my way to suggest it, would I? You're bright, resilient, ambitious, and — allowing for the fact that you're a love-sick teen-ager — quite level-headed. From my point of view, an ideal son-in-law. Bobo doubtless sees you in a different light, but I think, all in all, that she's made a wise, even a prudent, choice."

"What about the, quote, inequality of our circumstances, unquote? Isn't that even more a consideration in the case of getting married?"

"No, for you'd be equals. My son-in-law could never be other than well-to-do. The marriage might not work, of course, but that risk exists in all marriages. And the odds for its working are, I should think, much better than the odds for the Boston trial balloon. You can't dip your toes into marriage; you must plunge. What do you say?"

"What can I say? I'm flabbergasted."

Whiting opened a silver cigarette case standing on his desk and turned it round to Daniel with a gesture of invitation.

"No, thank you, I don't smoke."

"Nor do I, but this is grass. I always find that a bit of a buzz makes the decision-making process more interesting. Almost any process, really." By way of further endorsement he took one of the cigarettes from the case, lit it, inhaled, and still holding his breath, offered it to Daniel.

He shook his head, not believing it was marijuana.

Whiting shrugged, let out his breath, and sagged back in his leather chair.

"Let me tell you about pleasure, Daniel. It's something young people have no understanding of."

He took another toke, held it in, and offered the cigarette (coming from Grandison Whiting, you could not think of it as a joint) again to Daniel. Who, this time, accepted it.

Daniel had been stoned only three times in his life — once at Bob Lundgren's farm with some of the work crew from Spirit Lake and twice with Boa. It wasn't that he disapproved, or didn't enjoy it, or that the stuff was so impossible to get hold of. He was afraid, simply that. Afraid he'd be busted and sent back to Spirit Lake.

"Pleasure," said Grandison Whiting, lighting another cigarette for himself, "is the great good. It requires no explanations, no apologies. It is what it is — the reason for continuing. One must arrange one's life so that all pleasures are available. Not that there's time to *have* them all. Everyone's budget is limited in the end. But at your age, Daniel, you should be sampling the major varieties. In moderation. Sex, above all. Sex (perhaps after mystic transports, which come without our

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choosing) is always the most considerable, and cloys the least. But there is also something to be said for drugs, so long as you can hold on to your sanity, your health, and your own considered purpose in life. I gather, from the efforts you're making to learn to be a musician, despite an evident inaptitude, that you wish to fly."

"I ... uh...."

Whiting waved away Daniel's stillborn denial with the hand that held the cigarette. Its smoke formed a delta of delicate curves.

"I do not fly myself. I've tried, but lack the gift, and have small patience with effort in that direction. But I have many good friends who do fly, even here in Iowa. One of them did not return, but every delight has its martyrs. I say this because it's clear to me that you've made it your purpose in life to fly. I think, in your circumstances, that has been both ambitious and brave. But there are larger purposes, as I think you have begun to discover."

"What is your purpose, Mr. Whiting? If you care to say."

"I believe it is what you would call power. Not in the crude sense that one experiences power at Spirit Lake, not as brute coercion — but in a larger (and, I would hope, finer) sense. How to explain? Perhaps if I told you of my own mystical experience, the single such I've been gifted to have. If, that is, you can tolerate so long a detour from the business in hand?"

"So long as it's scenic," said Daniel, in a burst of what seemed to him show-stopping repartee. It was very direct grass.

"It happened when I was thirty-eight. I had just arrived in London. The euphoria of arrival was still in my blood. I had been meaning to go to an auction of carpets, but had spent the afternoon, instead, wandering westward to the City, stopping in at various churches of Wren's. But it was not in any of those that the lightning struck. It was as I was returning to my hotel room. I had placed the key in the lock and turned it. I could feel, in the mechanical movement of the tumblers, the movements, it seemed, of the entire solar system: the earth turning on its axis, moving in its orbit, the forces exerted on its oceans, and on its body too, by the sun and moon. I've said 'it seemed,' but it was no seeming. I felt it, as God must feel it. I'd never believed in God before that moment, nor ever doubted Him since."

"Power is turning a key in a lock?" Daniel asked, fuddled and fascinated in equal measure."

"It is to feel the consequences of one's actions spread through the world." He fell into a considering silence and then resumed: "It is an illusion, I suppose. All pleasures are, in the end, and all visions too. But it's a powerful illusion, and it is what I offer you."

"Thank you," said Daniel.

Grandison Whiting lifted a questioning eyebrow.

Daniel smiled, by way of explanation. "Thank you. I can't see any reason to go on being coy. I'm grateful: I accept. That is, if Boa will have me."

"Done," said Whiting, and held out his hand.

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"Assuming," he was careful to add, even as they shook on it, "that there are no strings attached."

"I can't promise that. But where there is agreement as to principle, a contract can always be negotiated. Shall we invite Bobo to join us now?"

"Sure. Though she can be a bit grouchy when she just wakes up."

"Oh, I doubt she would have gone to sleep. After he'd accompanied you here, Roberts brought Bobo to my secretary's office, where she has been able to observe our entire tête-a-tête over the closed-circuit TV." He looked over his shoulder and addressed the hidden camera (which must have been trained on Daniel all this while): "Your ordeal is is over now, Bobo dear, so why don't you join us?"

Daniel thought back over what he'd said to Whiting and decided that none of it was incriminating.

"I hope you don't mind?" Whiting added, turning back to Daniel.

"Mind? It's Boa who'll mind. Me, I'm past being shocked. After all, I've lived at Spirit Lake. The walls have ears there too. You haven't bugged my room at home, have you?"

"No. Though my security officer advised me to."

"I don't suppose you'd tell me if you had."

"Of course not." He smiled, and there were those bony teeth again. "But you can take my word for it."

When Boa arrived upon the scene, she was, as Daniel had predicted, in a temper over her father's meddling (over, at least, the manner of it), but she was also pleased to be all at once engaged with a whole new set of destinies and decisions. Planning was Boa's forte. Even as the champagne bubbled in her glass, she'd begun to consider the question of a date, and before the bottle was empty they'd settled on October 31. They both loved Halloween, and a Halloween wedding it was to be, with jack-o-lanterns everywhere, and the bride and groom in black and orange, and the wedding cake itself an orange cake, which was her favorite kind anyhow. Also (this was Grandison's contribution), the wedding guests would be able to stay on for a fox hunt. It had been years since there had been a proper hunt at Worry, and nothing was so sure to bring Alethea round to a cheerful sense of the occasion.

"And then, after the wedding?" Grandison Whiting asked, as he untwisted the wire fixed to the cork of the second bottle.

"After the wedding Daniel shall carry me off whithersoever he will for our honeymoon. Isn't that lovely: whithersoever?"

"And then?" he insisted, thumbing the cork.

"Then, after a suitable interval, we shall be fruitful and multiply. Starting off this early, we should be able to produce litters and litters of little Weinrebs. But you mean, don't you, what will we *do?*"

The cork popped, and Whiting refilled the three glasses.

"It does occur to me that you'll have rather a gap to fill before the next academic year begins."

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"That assumes, Father, that our years will continue to be of the academic variety."

"Oh, you must both get your degrees. That goes without saying. You've already settled on Harvard — wisely — and I'm sure room can be found there for Daniel too. So you needn't alter your plans in that respect. Only defer them."

"Have you asked Daniel if he *wants* to go to Harvard?"

"Daniel, do you want to go to Harvard?"

"I know I ought to. But where I really did want to go was the Boston Conservatory of Music. But they turned me down."

"Fairly, do you think?"

"Sure, but that doesn't make it hurt any less. I just wasn't 'accomplished' enough."

"Yes, that was my sister-in-law's opinion, too. She said you'd done wonders for the short time you'd studied, and in view of the fact that you evidenced no innate talent for music."

"Oof," said Daniel.

"Did you think we never spoke of you?"

"No. But that's a pretty deflating opinion. The more so because it's very close to what someone else once said, someone who was also ... knowledgeable."

"On the whole, Harriet thought very highly of you. But she didn't think you were cut out for a career in music. Not a very satisfying career at any rate."

"She never said that to me," Boa objected.

"Surely because she knew you'd have passed it on to Daniel. She had no wish to wound his feelings gratuitously."

"Then why are *you* telling him, Father?"

"To persuade him to make other plans. Don't suppose, Daniel, that I'd have you give up music. You couldn't, I'm sure. It is a passion, perhaps a ruling passion. But you needn't become a professional musician to be serious about music. Witness Miss Marspan. Or if she seems too desiccated to serve as a model to you, consider Moussorgsky, who was a civil servant, or Charles Ives, an insurance executive. The music of the nineteenth century, which remains our greatest music, was written for the discerning delectation of a vast audience of musical amateurs."

"Mr. Whiting, you don't need to go on. I've said the same thing to myself many times. I wasn't suggesting that it's the Boston Conservatory or nothing. Or that I have to go to a music school at all. I would like to take some private lessons with someone good —"

"Naturally," said Whiting.

"As for the rest of what I ought to do, you seem to have it all laid out. Why not just say what you have in mind, and I'll tell you how it strikes me?"

"Fair enough. To begin with the immediate future, I'd like you to go to work for me here at Worry. At a salary, shall we say of forty thousand a year, paid quarterly, in advance. That should be enough to set you up. You'll have to spend it, you know, as fast as is comes in. It will be expected that you

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flaunt your conquest. To do less would show a lack of appreciation. You'll become, for a time, the hero of Amesville."

"Our picture will be in all the papers," Boa put in. "And the wedding will probably be on the TV news."

"Necessarily," Whiting agreed. "We can't afford to neglect such an opportunity for public relations. Daniel will be another Horatio Alger."

"Tell me more." Daniel was grinning. "What do I have to do to earn my preposterous salary."

"You'll work for it, believe me. Essentially it will be the same job you did for Robert Lundgren. You'll manage the crews of seasonal workers."

"That's Carl Mueller's job."

"Carl Mueller is getting the sack. That is another aspect of your triumph. I hope you have nothing against revenge?"

"Sweet Jesus."

"Well, *I* have something against revenge, Father, though I won't enter into an argument on theoretical grounds. But won't other people whom Daniel has to work with resent him if he takes Carl's job away?"

"They'll resent him in any case. But they'll know (they already do know, I'm sure) that there are objective reasons for firing Carl. He's rather systematically taken kickbacks from the hiring agencies he works through. His predecessor did as well, and it may almost be thought to be one of the fringe benefits of his job. But I hope that you, Daniel, will resist the temptation. For one thing, you'll be earning something over double Carl's salary."

"You realize," Daniel said in as neutral a tone as he could manage, "that Carl will lose his draft classification along with his job."

"That's Carl's lookout, isn't it? By the same token, you stand to inherit his exemption. So I suggest that you do have that P-W housing removed from your stomach. Harvard's security network is probably a few degrees tighter than mine. You wouldn't want to be setting off alarms every time you went to class."

"I'll be only too happy to be rid of it. As soon as I start the job. When would you like me to report?"

"Tomorrow. Drama requires despatch. The more sudden your rise, the more complete your triumph."

"Mr. Whiting —"

"Still not 'Father?"

"Father." But it did seem to stick in his mouth. He shook his head and said it again. "Father, the one thing I still don't understand is why. Why are you doing all this for me?"

"I've never tried to resist what I regarded as inevitable. That is the secret of any very prolonged success. Then, too, I like you, which sweetens the pill considerably. But it wasn't my decision, ultimately. It was Bobo's. And it was, I think, the right one." He exchanged a nod of acknowledgement with his daughter. "Old families need an infusion of new blood from time to time. Any other questions?"

"Mm. Yes, one."

"Which is?"

"No, I realize now it's something I shouldn't ask. Sorry."

Grandison Whiting didn't press the

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point, and the conversation moved back towards the laying of plans, which (since they were not to be carried out) need not be reported here.

The question Daniel didn't ask was why Whiting had never grown his own beard. It would have been so much easier in the long run, and he'd never have run the risk of being accidentally unmasked. But since the answer was probably that he'd tried to grow one and it hadn't come in to his liking, it hadn't seemed diplomatic to ask.

Daniel decided (among the many other plans that were formed that night) to grow a beard himself. His own was naturally thick and wiry. But after the wedding, not before.

He wondered if this were the fate he'd foreseen for himself so long ago, when he was pedaling along the road to Unity. Every time he'd gone to Worry, he'd had to pass the same spot on the road where he'd stopped and had his revelation. He could remember little of that vision now, only a general sense that something terrific was in store for him. This was certainly terrific. But it wasn't (he finally decided) the particular benediction that his vision had foretold. That was still up ahead, lost in the glare of all his other glories.

It seemed ironic to Daniel, and a bit of a defeat, that he should be having his first flight in an airplane. He had sworn to himself, in the not-so-long-ago heyday of his idealistic youth, that he would never fly except on his own two transubstantial wings. Now look at him — strapped into his seat, his nose pressed against the postage-stamp of a window, with four hundred pounds of excess baggage, and a track record of absolute zero. For all his brave talk and big ambitions, he never tried — never tried trying — once Grandison Whiting had laid down the law. It was Daniel's own fault for mentioning that he meant to smuggle in a flight apparatus from out-of-state, his fault for believing Whiting's stories about friends of his right here in Iowa who flew. Pure bullshit, all of it. Not that it mattered, awfully. It only meant he'd had to postpone the big day for a while longer, but he knew that time would fly even if he didn't.

Now the waiting was behind him, all but a few hours. He and Boa were on their way. To New York first, where they would change for a jet to Rome. Then Athens, Cairo, Teheran, and the Seychelles for a winter tan. Economy was the official reason for changing at Kennedy rather than going direct from Des Moines, since everything, including travel bookings, was cheaper in New York. Daniel, despite his every extravagance, had established a reputation as a penny-pincher. In Des Moines he'd wasted one whole day fleeing from one tailor to another, horrified by their prices. He understood, in theory, that he was supposed to be above such things now that he was *nouveau riche,* that the difference between the prices of two equivalent commodities was supposed to be invisible to him. He ought not to itemize bills, nor count his change, nor remember the amounts, or even the existence, of sums that old friends asked to borrow. But it was amazing, and dismay-

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ing, what the smell of money did to otherwise reasonable people, the way they came sniffing and snuffling around you, and he couldn't stop resenting them for it. His character rejected the aristocratic attitude that money, at least on the level of "friendly" transactions, was no more to be taken account of than the water you showered with, much as his body would have rejected a transfusion of the wrong blood type.

But economy was only an excuse for booking the honeymoon through New York. The real reason was what they'd be able to do during the twelve hours between planes. That, however, was a secret. Not a very dark secret, since Boa had managed for a week now not to guess despite the broadest hints. Surely she knew and wasn't letting on from sheer love of feigning surprise. (No one could equal Boa at the art of unwrapping presents.) What could it be, after all, but a visit to First National Flightpaths? At last, sweet Jesus: at long, sweet last!

The plane took off, and the stewardesses performed a kind of pantomime with the oxygen masks, then brought round trays of drinks and generally made an agreeable fuss. Clouds rolled by, revealing checkerboards of farmland, squiggles of river, plumblines of highway. All very disappointing compared to the way he'd imagined it. But after all, *this* wasn't the real thing.

First National Flightpaths was the real thing. First National Flightpaths specialized in getting beginning flyers off the ground. "All you need," the brochure had said, "is a sincere feeling for the song you sing. We just provide the atmosphere — and leave the flying to you."

He had been drinking steadily all day during the wedding and the reception, without (he was pretty certain) letting it show, even to Boa. He continued drinking on the plane. He lit a cigar, which the stewardess immediately made him put out. Left feeling abashed and cantankerous, he started — or rather, restarted — an argument he'd had earlier that day with Boa. About her Uncle Charles, the Representative. He had given them a sterling service for twelve as a wedding present, which Boa had insisted on cooing over privately, as they were driving to the airport. Finally he'd exploded and said what he thought about Charles Whiting — *and* his brother Grandison. What he thought was that Grandison had arranged their marriage for the benefit of Charles, and of the family name, knowing that Charles was shortly to be involved in something approaching a scandal. Or so it had been presented in some of the more outspoken newspapers on the East Coast. The scandal concerned a lawyer hired by a subcommittee of Ways and Means (the committee that Charles chaired), who had caused a stink, no one knew precisely what about, since the government had managed to clamp the lid on before the actual details became public. Somehow it concerned the American Civil Liberties Union, an organization concerning which Charles had made several intemperate and highly publicized remarks. Now the subcom-

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mittee lawyer had vanished, and Uncle Charles was spending all his time telling reporters he had no comment. From the first inklings in the *Star-Tribune* it was obvious to Daniel that the wedding had been arranged as a kind of media counterweight to the scandal — weddings being irreproachable PR. It was not obvious to Boa. Neither of them knew more about it than could be gleaned from papers, since Grandison Whiting refused, categorically, to discuss it. When, only days before the wedding, he realized the depth of Daniel's suspicions, he became quite incensed, though Boa had managed to smooth both their tempers. Daniel had apologized, but his doubts remained. From these entanglements had issued their quarrel in the Whiting limousine (a quarrel further complicated by Boa's panicky concern that the chauffeur should not overhear them); this was again the subject of their quarrel on route to Kennedy; it promised to be their quarrel forever, since Boa would not allow any doubts about her father to go unchallenged. She became Jesuitical in his defense, and then strident. Other passengers made reproving glances at them. Daniel wouldn't give up. Soon he'd driven Boa to making excuses for Uncle Charles. Daniel reacted by upping the level of his sarcasm (a form of combat he'd learned from his mother, who could be scathing). Only after Boa had burst into tears, would he lay off.

The plane landed in Cleveland and took off again. The stewardess brought more drinks. Though he'd managed to stop arguing, he felt rotten. Balked. Resentful. His anger turned everything good that had happened into something equally bad. He felt cheated, corrupted, betrayed. All the glamor of the past nine weeks evaporated. All his posturings before his friends were wormwood now — for he knew they'd be making the same calculations and seeing his marriage in this new, less rosy light.

And, yet, wasn't it possible that Boa was right in a way? If her father hadn't dealt with him in a manner wholly truthful, he may at least have limited himself to half-truths. Then, too, whatever motives Grandison Whiting may have concealed, the result was still this happy ending here and now. He should, as Boa suggested, put the rest out of mind, relax, lie back and enjoy the beginning of what looked to be the endless banquet ahead.

Besides, it wouldn't do to arrive at First National Flightpaths feeling any otherwise than mellow.

So, by way of thinking of something else, he read, in the airline's own magazine, an article about trout fishing written by one of the country's top novelists. When he'd finished it, he was convinced that trout fishing would be a delightful pastime to take up. Would there be trout, he wondered, in the Seychelles? Probably not.

The nicest thing about New York, Daniel decided, after being there five minutes, was that you were invisible. Nobody noticed anyone else. In fact, it was Daniel who wasn't noticing, as he found out when someone almost got away with his carryon suitcase, which

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Boa rescued by a last-minute grab. So much for patriotic feelings about his old home town. (For he was, as he'd many times pointed out to Boa, a New Yorker by birth.)

The taxi ride from the airport to First National Flightpaths took a maddening forty minutes. (The brochure had promised: "Just ten minutes from Kennedy.") It took another fifteen minutes to register as Ben and Beverly Bosola (the brochure had also pointed out that New York law did not hold it criminal to adopt or use an alias, so long as fraud was not involved) and to be shown to their suite on the twenty-fourth floor. There were three rooms: a regular hotel room (with double bed, kitchenette, and a sound system to equal the best at Worry) and two small studios adjoining. When the attendant asked Daniel if he knew how to work the apparatus, he took a deep breath and admitted that he didn't. The explanation, together with a demonstration, took another five minutes. You smeared a little stickum on your forehead and over that snugged on a headband to which the wires connected. Then you had to lie back in what Daniel would have sworn was a dentist's chair. And sing. Daniel tipped the attendant ten dollars, and finally they were alone.

"We've got eleven hours," he said. "Ten, really, if we don't want to miss the plane. Though it's silly, isn't it, talking about planes when here we are, ready to take off ourselves. Jesus, I'm so nervous."

Boa threw back her head and whirled one small whirl on the mustard-yellow carpet, making the pumpkin-orange of her wedding dress billow out about her. "So am I," she said quietly. "But in the nicest way."

"Do you want to make love first? They say that helps sometimes. To put you in the right frame of mind."

"I'd rather do that afterwards, I think. It may seem terribly presumptuous to say so, but I feel the most complete confidence. I don't know why."

"I do too. But, you know, for all that, it might not work. You can never tell in advance. They say only about thirty per cent make it the first time."

"Well, if not tonight, another time."

"But *if* tonight, oh boy!" He grinned.

"Oh boy," she agreed.

They kissed and then each of them went into a separate sound studio. Daniel, following the attendant's advice, sang through his song once before wiring himself in. He had chosen Mahler's *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen.* From the first moment he'd heard the song on a recording, a year ago, he'd known that *that* was the song for his first flight. Its three short stanzas read like an instruction manual for takeoff, and the music.... Nothing could be said about such music: it was perfection.

He sang, wired in, to his own accompaniment, recorded on a cassette, and at the end of the second stanza — "For really, I am dead to the world" — he thought he had lifted off. But he hadn't. A second time, as the song went on — "Lost in death to the

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world's riot, I rest in a realm of perfect quiet" — he felt the music propelling his mind right out of his flesh.

But at the end of the song he was still there, in that pink padded chair, in his starched shirt and black tux, in his own obdurate flesh.

He sang the song again, but without the same conviction, and without results.

Not to panic. The brochure said that very often the most effective song, in terms of reaching escape velocity, isn't one for which we have the highest regard or greatest love. Probably his problem with the Mahler song was technical, despite the trouble he'd taken to transpose it down to his own range. All the authorities agreed that it was useless to tackle music beyond your capabilities.

His next offering was "I Am the Captain of the Pinafore," to which he gave all the extra faith and oomph he could muster. That was the way he still remembered it, almost like a hymn, from the dream he'd dreamt the night before he got out of Spirit Lake. But he couldn't stop feeling silly about it and worrying what someone listening would have thought. Never mind that the studio was soundproof. Naturally, with that kind of self-consciousness, his score was another big zero.

He sang his two favorite songs from *Die Winterreise,* to which he could usually bring a sincere, droopy *Weltschmerz.* But in the middle of the second song he broke off. There was no use even trying, feeling the way he felt.

It was less an emotion than a physical sensation. As though some huge black hand had gripped his chest and squeezed. A steady pressure on his heart and lungs, and a taste of metal on his tongue.

He got down on the mustard carpet and did pushups rapidly, till he was out of breath. That helped some. Then he went out into the bedroom to pour himself a drink.

A red light glowed above the door to Boa's studio: she was flying.

His instant reaction was to be happy for her. Then came the envy. He was glad, thinking about it, that it hadn't happened the other way round. He wanted to go in and look at her, but that seemed somehow like admitting defeat: you look at people do the things you'd like to do yourself — and can't.

The only booze in the icebox was three bottles of champagne. He'd been drinking it all day long and was sick of it, but he didn't want to phone room service for beer. So he guzzled a bottle of it as quickly as he could.

He kept looking up at the light above the door, wondering if she'd taken off on her first try, and what song she'd used, and where she was now. She might have been anywhere in the city, since all the First National's studios had direct access to the outside. Finally, unable to stand it any more, he went in and looked at her. Or rather, at the body she'd left behind.

Her arm had fallen from the armrest and hung limply in a filmy envelope of orange *crepe de Chine.* He lifted it, so limp, and placed it on the padded rest.

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Her eyes were open, but blank. A bead of saliva drooled down from her parted lips. He closed her eyes and wiped away the spittle. She seemed colder than a living body ought to be; she seemed dead.

He went back to his own room and tried again. Doggedly, he went through everything twice. He sang songs by Elgar and Ives: they weren't as great as Mahler's but they were in Daniel's own language, and that was a consideration. He sang arias from Bach cantatas, choruses from Verdi operas. He sang songs he'd never heard before (the studio was well-equipped with both scores and accompaniment cassettes) and old love songs he remembered from the radio, years and years before. Three hours he sang, until there was nothing left of his voice but a rasp and an ache deep in his throat.

When he returned to the outer room, the light was still on over Boa's door.

He went to bed and stared at that baleful red eye glowing in the darkness. For a while he cried, but he made himself stop. He couldn't believe that she could just go off like this, knowing (as she surely must) that he'd been left behind. It was their wedding night, after all. Their honeymoon. Was she still angry with him for what he'd said about her father? Or didn't anything else matter, once you could fly?

But the worst of it wasn't that she had gone: the worst of it was that he was here. And might be, forever.

He started crying again, a slow steady drip of tears, and this time he let them come, for he remembered the brochure's advice not to let your feelings get bottled up inside. Eventually, with a bottle of tears and of champagne both emptied, he managed to fall asleep.

He woke an hour after the plane had departed for Rome. The light was still burning above the studio door.

Once, when he was learning to drive, he'd backed Bob Lundgren's pickup off the side of a dirt road and couldn't get the back wheels up out of the ditch. The bed of the truck was full of bags of seed, and so he couldn't just go off to look for help, since Bob had few neighbors who would have been above helping themselves. He'd honked the horn and blinked the lights till the battery was dead — to no avail. Eventually he'd exhausted his impatience and started to see the situation as a joke. By the time Bob found him, at two a.m., he was completely unruffled and calm.

He'd reached that point again. If he had to wait for Boa, then he'd wait. Waiting was something he was good at.

He phoned down to the desk to say he'd be keeping the suite for another day and to order breakfast. Then he turned on the TV, which was showing what must have been the oldest cowboy movie ever made. Gratefully he let his mind sink into the story. The heroine explained to the hero that her parents had been killed in the massacre on Superstition Mountain, which seemed a truth as inexplicable as it was universal. His breakfast came, a gargantuan breakfast fit for the last hours of a man

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condemned to the gallows. Only after he'd finished his fourth fried egg did he realize that it was meant to be breakfast for two. Feeling replete, he went up to the roof and swam, all by himself, in the heated pool. He did slow weightless somersaults in the water, parodies of flight. When he returned to the room, Boa's light was still glowing. She was spread out on the reclining seat exactly as he'd left her the night before. With half a thought that she might, if she were in the room and watching him, decide to be a dutiful wife and return to her body (and her husband), he bent down to kiss her forehead. In doing so, he knocked her arm from the armrest. It dangled from her shoulder like a puppet's limb. He left it so and returned to the outer room, where someone had used his few minutes away to make the bed and take away the tray of dishes.

Still feeling oddly lucid and *degagé*, he looked through a catalogue of cassettes available (at ridiculous prices, but what the hell) from the shop in the lobby. He phoned down an order, more or less at random, for Haydn's *The Seasons*.

At first he followed the text, hastening back and forth between the German and the English, but that required a more focused attention than he could muster. He didn't want to assimilate but just, lazily, to enjoy. He went on listening with half an ear. The drapes were drawn and the lights turned off. Every so often, the music would take hold, and he'd start being able to see little explosions of color in the darkness of the room, quick arabesques of light that echoed the emphatic patterns of the music. It was something he remembered doing ages ago, before his mother had run away, when they had all lived here in New York. He would lie in his bed and listen to the radio playing in the next room and see, on the ceiling, as on a black movie screen, movies of his mind's own making, lovely semi-abstract flickerings and long zooming swoops through space, compared to which these little bips and flashes were weak tea indeed.

From the first, it would seem, music had been a visual art for him. Or, rather, a spatial art. Just as it must be for dancers. (And confess it: didn't he enjoy himself more when he danced than when he sang? — and didn't he do it better?) Or for a conductor even, when he stands at the core of the music's possibility and calls it into being by the motions of his baton. Perhaps that explained why Daniel couldn't fly — because, in some essential way that he would never understand, music was forever alien to him, a foreign language that he must always be translating, word by word, into the language he knew. But how could that be, when music could mean so much to him? Even now, at a moment like this!

For Spring and Summer were fled, and the bass was singing of Autumn and the hunt, and Daniel was lifted outside himself by the music's gathering momentum. Then, with a ferocity unmatched by anything else in Haydn, the hunt itself began. Horns sounded. A double chorus replied. The fanfare swelled, and formed ... a landscape. Indeed, the tones that rolled and rol-

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licked from the bells of the horns *were* that landscape, a broad expanse of wooded hills through which the hunters careened, resistless as the wind. Each "Tally-ho!" they cried was a declaration of possessing pride, a human signature slashed across the rolling fields, the very ecstasy of ownership. He'd never understood before the fascination of hunting, not on the scale on which it was conducted at Worry. He'd supposed it was something rich people felt obliged to do, as they were obliged to use silver and china and crystal. For what intrinsic interest could there be in killing one small fox? But the fox, he saw now, was only a pretext, an excuse for the hunters to go galloping off across their demesne, leaping walls and hedges, indifferent to boundaries of every kind, because the land belonged to them so far as they could ride and sing out "Tally-ho!"

It was splendid, undeniably — splendid as music and as idea. Grandison Whiting would have been gratified to hear it set forth so plainly. But the fox takes a different view of the hunt, necessarily. And Daniel knew, from the look he had seen so often in his father-in-law's eyes, that *he* was the fox. He, Daniel Weinreb. He knew, what's more, that the whole of wisdom, for any fox, may be written in a single word. Fear.

Once they put you in prison, you're never entirely out of it again. It enters you and builds its walls within your heart. And once the hunt begins it doesn't stop till the fox has been run to earth, till the hounds have torn it and the huntsman has held it up, a bleeding proof that the rulers and owners of the world will have no pity on the likes of a fox.

Even then, even in the grip of this fear, things might have happened otherwise, for it was a pellucid, not a panicky fear. But then, in the afternoon (Boa had yet to return), it was announced, as the third item on the TV news, that a plane on its way to Rome had exploded over the Atlantic and that among the passengers (all of whom had perished) was the daughter of Grandison Whiting and her newly-wed husband. There was a picture, from the wedding, of the official kiss. Daniel, in his tux, had his back turned to the camera.

The explosion was said to be the work of unidentified terrorists. No mention was made of the A.C.L.U. but the implication was there.

Daniel was sure that he knew better.

(to be concluded next month)

ANSWER TO ACROSTIC PUZZLE IN FEBRUARY ISSUE
From page 153 of DOCTOR RAT by William Kotzwinkle (Bantam):

"Stop, you buggers!" See *Buggery in Rhesus Monkeys,* Harris and Logan, Nord College Series: *"the weakest of the males, called Suzy, buggered by his companions;" see also my Newsletter for March.*

They've freed him!

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LETTERS

FROM NANTUCKET SHOALS

I have just finished reading Hilbert Schenck's novelet, *The Morphology of the Kirkham Wreck.* Sept. 1978, on my 0400-0800 watch this morning, and find that I am forced to write my first LOC. As a member of the same service as the Caskata crew (the Lifesaving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service were merged in 1915 to form the U.S. Coast Guard), I laughed, cried, pulled and cheered with "Skipper" Chase and his men.

The story was amazingly accurate in navigation (I followed the surfboat's progress on the ship's chart of the area), equipment description and useage, and overall seamanship. Details such as the *unoffical* motto of the Coast Guard, "You only have to go out," and the timeless reputation of Wood's Hole rang true. And above all, the endless hate/love affair of the lifesavers with their friend and enemy, the sea which they work with and against.

Lest it be thought that I wax too great in my appreciation, let me hasten to add that I have weathered the January storms on Nantucket Shoals. They must be experienced to be believed. After looking out the bridge portholes to see nothing but green water, and seconds later rising up at express speed to view miles of storm racked chaos, only to be dropped into the next trough; after hearing sea-water fall *down* on the top of our seventy-foot-above-water-line main light, perhaps I felt more of that short two day storm than your average mid-continent reader. (This is *not* meant as an insult — I grew up in a Detroit suburb, and I thought my shipmates were exaggerating their storm reports. I was mistaken.)

The selection of this setting for the paranormal temporal events was most fitting. The idea of a mere human imposing his will on *those* seas is staggering. All that I can hope is that when my need presses as Walter Chase's did, that I shall fall heir to his abilities.

Overall, this is an outstanding tale. It shall doubtless surface in my mind each time we drop anchor on Nantucket Shoals. My congratulations to Mr. Schenck.

— *David L. Roach*
Electronics Technician
Third Class, USCG
Coast Guard Lightship Relief,
manning
Nantucket Shoals Lightship Station

We have two new sea-going sf stories by Hilbert Schenck in inventory: "The Battle of the Abaco Reefs" and "Buoyant Ascent," both coming up soon.

FROM MINNEAPOLIS

Re the October F&SF: Come, come sir! If you give us King and Bishop in one issue, surely you should have made an effort to have stories by Ellery Queen and Damon Knight in that issue, too? I thought the Bishop and Carr (a Carr moves forward or back but stops at a red checker) stories were marvelous.

—Ruth Berman

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ON GETTING CRETACEOUS-AGE CRITTERS RIGHT

Sterling Lanier's "The Syndicated Time" (F&SF, July) was a rousing good tale, but it brought up in me a scum of nitpicking that has been building for some time. I'm sure that Brigadier FFellowes would have had some more colorful phrase.

SF writers seem determined to set tales in the remote geologic past. In so doing, they seem to skim a picture book or two and pick out an appropriately ugly "rogues' gallery" to lend their story appropriate color. With a few treasured exceptions, they invariably manage to put together a group of critters that never managed to co-exist in time, let alone space. Lanier is not a particularly vile offender, but his assemblage makes the point well.

Geologic time is vast, and any credible story should be set in a discrete part of it. Add to this the simple fact that much of the past has seen a planet as varied in its plant and animal life as was the present before man simplified and homogenized it. I can speak with a degree of authority here. I'm an unreformed kid so hung up on dinosaurs that I have earned a Ph.D in vertebrate paleontology (that's fossil bones, fellas!) from a rather respectable institution.

The time span Lanier selects, 80 to 150 million years, is a crude equivalent of us big boys' Cretaceous Period (65 to 135 m.y. is better, but I won't quibble). This period alone was long enough for the entire fauna of the Earth to change 20 times over, not counting a few stodgy holdouts. An average species last an average of about 3,000,000, which makes us at about 500,000 just callow youths. Some, of course, last much longer, but a lot don't stick around nearly that long.

Even if Lanier had actually stuck to Cretaceous-age critters, then, he could well have come up with the equivalent of: "Hitler then led his Roman legions against the Assyrians of Rameses II." Try that one on as sober history. As a matter of fact, he didn't even manage to stay within his self-imposed boundaries. Looking at his little gallery is quite enlightening.

The star of the show, *Monoclonius,* is a Late Cretaceous form. Roughly, he stomped about 70 to 90 megayears ago. By his heyday, birds were quite abundant, and the woods were full of flowers. Some of both you might even recognize, like storks and magnolias. Lanier's point about grass, though, is well taken. The plesiosaurs that first assault old *Mono's* carcass are just barely possible, though they were well past their prime and most likely munched small fishes, since their teeth couldn't slash, just stab. The shark was distinctly gauche, though. The only shark outside Hollywood that answers that description is *Carcharodon megalodon,* a youngster from the Miocene, a mere 10 to 25 m. y. There were Cretaceous sharks, but nothing a puny modern Great White would consider anything but lunch.

On the other hand, the large creature being so woefully shredded by artillery was a sauropod like the beloved *Brontosaurus* or the even more spectacular *Brachiosaurus.* This group flourished in the Late Jurassic, about 150 m. y. A few rather large ones made it to 100 m. y., but the only one that might have looked a *Monoclonius* in the eye was the scrawny *Alamosaurus,* which probably wouldn't have survived a collision with a school bus at low speed. Complicating the matter fur-

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ther, *Mono* wandered in Wyoming, Montana, and Canada while *Alamosaurus* graced the fauna of New Mexico and (of course) Texas.

The real hero, *Kronosaurus,* swam the seas of Australia — and as far as we know, no place else — about 110 m. y. ago. Lanier even manages to exaggerate this pet beastie of mine a bit. That is hardly necessary in an animal that had teeth a foot long. No lie, I've seen some. However, he bent my mind with the image of a spawning fun (stet that, my typewriter just did a Freudian) of them. It just might have happened, and my colleagues were too dull to think about it. I'm thinking of a learned paper...

My nits are picked now, and I'm going to try to make this constructive. I can't expect the common *Writerus scifiensis* to know as much about this subject as I do. I hereby volunteer myself to provide information for writers considering a story set in the geologic past. Anything from a crude outline to a rough MS will elicit a flow of notes from me that will make your tale consistent. I will guarantee that any piece of geologic time you care to pick within the last half billion or so will contain plenty of "temporally colorful" critters. Some of them you will have heard of, but there are some real weirdies that never made it to the popular press. I will answer with some speed, unless and until I get too many. I won't even try to steal your idea, even if I am now trying to screw up my guts to send in a SF MS somewhere. It has nothing to do with fossils, by the way.

—John T. Thurmond

P.S. Ron Walotsky could use my services too. About the only detail he got right on his cover of *Monoclonius* was the number of horns!

ON BUDRYS'S "BOOKS"

I'd like to make a brief comment on Algis Budrys's September "Books' column. In the first section he makes some comments on Fritz Leiber that I could not agree with more. For many years I have felt that reading Leiber's work was like seeing the tip of the iceberg. The depth and scope of his fiction abilities and casual allusions that suggest more than a smattering of knowledge in a variety of fields convince me that there is one hell of a man writing those stories.

Like Budrys, I am perpetually puzzled that his work does not receive more attention. Tracking down his books and ordering has consumed more of my time than I would expend on the average author. But when the books finally arrive, I have always been satisfied that my time and money was well spent.

It is a pleasure to see a reviewer of Budry's quality and experience give Fritz Leiber that attention and credit he so richly deserves. (And if Budrys continues to give me the pleasure of concisive, accurate book reviews, I will continue to make his section of your magazine the first one I turn to.)

—M. Ogden

Algis Budrys' "Books" column is essential reading for me with each issue of F&SF. It is a delight. Mr. Budrys has the style to match his insight, and his essays seem to me both significant and pleasurable.

And that is the extent of this letter. Every once in a while it would seem to make sense to nod at something you like; keeps the good stuff around.

Thanks

—Walt S. Jaschek

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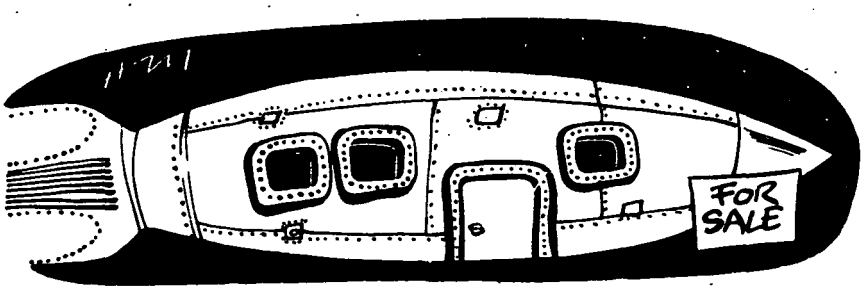

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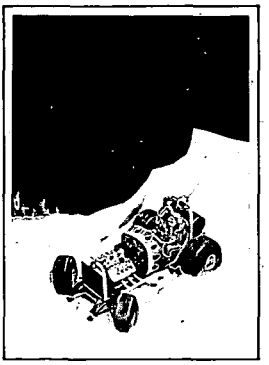

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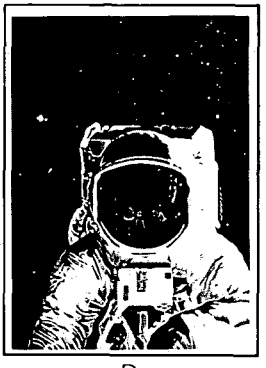

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